The need for organizational change management techniques in ensuring Lean Six Sigma project success

Introduction

Many Lean Six Sigma practitioners underestimate the importance of effective organizational change management in the success of their projects. While a great deal of effort is spent focusing on the technical aspects of the project such as analyzing data, the people side of the effort is often overlooked. This is the greatest cause of project failure.

The Lean Six Sigma DMAIC methodology offers a great deal of tools to collect and analyze data in determining the root cause of an issue. However the methodology offers very few organizational change management techniques to manage the people who will be impacted by the changes of the Lean Six Sigma effort.

Prosci’s 2014 Best Practices in Change Management benchmarking study identified the following factors as the most important contributors to a successful change management effort:

1. Active and visible executive sponsorship
2. Structured change management approach
3. Dedicated change management resources and funding
4. Frequent and open communication about the change and the need for change
5. Employee engagement and participation
6. Engagement and integration with project management
7. Engagement with and support from middle management

There are several organizational change management techniques that will enable effective organizational change and ensure a more successful Lean Six Sigma project. These practices need to be developed and executed based on the culture of the organization:

Establish a Lean Six Sigma project governance structure – Having an effective Lean Six Sigma project governance structure in place ensures management is aligned to a common strategy. The governance structure also ensures that middle management and executive leadership are engaged in the effort and that project issues and resistance are identified and addressed at the highest necessary levels of management.

Develop a stakeholder management strategy and plan – Executives, middle management and line workers have different needs and concerns. If those needs and concerns are not addressed properly, resistance to the project will develop. The stakeholder management strategy and plan ensures that the people impacted by the Lean Six Sigma project are identified and engaged properly.
Create a communication management strategy and plan – It is absolutely essential that all stakeholders impacted by the lean six sigma project receive communications on a regular basis. The key to successful communication is realizing that not all stakeholders are alike. Project communication is not all about communicating project status. Project communication needs to address the different needs and concerns of executive management, middle management and line workers as well as create anticipation for the new lean six sigma project solution. Utilizing the stakeholder management strategy and plan, it is essential to craft a communication strategy and execute a communication plan that addresses each of the various stakeholders.

Create a training strategy and plan – As with the communication strategy and plan, the key to a successful training effort is realizing that various stakeholders have different training needs. Ensuring all stakeholders are properly trained with the correct level of knowledge will greatly reduce organizational resistance. At minimum, different training packages need to be developed for executive management, middle management and line workers. Having a “one size fits all” training approach develops resistance within the organization and dramatically increases the probability of failure of your lean six sigma project.

Develop an organizational readiness strategy and plan – The key to ensuring the success of a Lean Six Sigma project is knowing when an organization is ready to embrace change. There truly comes a point in time where management is aligned, everyone has received the project communications, training has been delivered and anticipation for change brought about by the Lean Six Sigma effort is at its highest. Through surveys, focus groups, and informal feedback it is very important to determine when organizational readiness is at its highest and rolling out the Lean Six Sigma project will be embraced and not resisted.

Conclusion

As change agents, Lean Six Sigma practitioners must be able to: create a persuasive case for change, gain commitment and cooperation from the organization, influence without power and eliminate resistance. By incorporating the organizational change management techniques outlined above, Lean Six Sigma practitioners are better able to manage their stakeholders and ensure project success. Without the incorporation of organizational change management techniques in the DMAIC methodology to manage the people side of the Lean Six Sigma project, the probability of project failure rises dramatically.

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