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The Art of "Hard & Soft"—Why You Should Integrate the Three Top Performance Improvement Disciplines to Transform Your Company

A powerful new book by internationally-renowned consultant Tom Devane teaches how—and why—to combine the best of Lean, Six Sigma and HPO.

Philadelphia, PA (January 2004)—It's only human to love the idea of a "magic bullet." Business leaders are no exception. When we hear about a company's success with the latest improvement initiative—say, a "hard skills" program like Lean Enterprise or Six Sigma (or the combined Lean Six Sigma) or a "soft skills" one like High-Performance Organizations—our first instinct is to try it out ourselves. But in reality, every company has different needs, problems and cultures. What works for a General Electric won't necessarily work for a Kodak, and what works for a mid-sized company won't work for a government agency. There is no magic bullet for moving your organization to the next level. You must maximize the performance of your processes *and* your people . . . and it's integrating the two that poses such a challenge.

"There *is* a way to combine the best parts of the three most powerful improvement disciplines so that you quickly get great results that stay with you for the long haul," says Tom Devane, author of *Integrating Lean Six Sigma and High-Performance Organizations: Leading the Charge Toward Dramatic, Rapid and Sustainable Improvement* (Pfeiffer/A Wiley Imprint, 2004, ISBN: 0-7879-6973-7, \$45.00). "You do this not by implementing one program and then another, but by implementing the best parts of the three in a single, cohesive wave. When you use the strategy outlined in my book, each program magnifies the strengths of the others while compensating for the weaknesses."

Devane's book teaches leaders at all levels how to integrate the best practices in "hard" (technical) and "soft" (people) aspects of performance improvement to achieve sustainable results and instill an attitude of continuous improvement throughout the organization. It offers the principles, tools, and guidance they need to solve common problems and create an environment that fosters high performance. Furthermore, it's filled with colorful, real-life stories from a wide range of companies—stories that readers can easily apply to their own circumstances.

Devane says that for change efforts to be successful there must be an interplay of three elements: *"know how"* (a set of methods, tools and processes that would help rapidly implement the proposed improvements), *"want to"* (willingness of the workforce to make the changes), and *"pay for"* (good ROI on the change efforts). Here, excerpted from his book, is a brief description of the "pure" elements of each discipline and its strengths and weaknesses in terms of the three core elements:

✓**Lean Manufacturing** focuses on cycle time reduction and eliminating waste. It can be taught quickly to many, and can yield rapid improvements that address the "pay for" element of a successful improvement approach. However, "know how" is limited to addressing a selected set of problems since Lean cannot bring a process under statistical control or identify problems in measurement systems that can wreak havoc if tests are not repeatable and reproducible. In addition, culture change is localized to the areas doing improvements. The "want to" element can quickly fade if management does not consistently make time for, reward, and encourage consistent application of the tools and principles.

✓**Six Sigma** deploys statistical methods to reduce variation and eliminate defects, as well as linking objectives to the formal management system. Its statistical body of "know how" can bring processes under control and determine if measurement systems require adjustment. Because extensive data collection and analysis are often required, an impatient organization may prematurely stop projects because they don't seem to be addressing the "pay for" element. As with Lean, culture change is localized to the project teams doing improvements and teams sometimes experience backsliding once the project is completed. The lack of universal "want to" attitude has caused many Six Sigma projects to stall.

✓**High-Performance Organization (HPO)** principles and methods focus on quickly changing the organization's structure and culture to foster ownership, accountability, job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and commitment to the organization's strategy. By addressing these "want to" elements, organizational members often make improvement suggestions that "pay for" themselves quickly. However, "know how" is limited to applying organizational design principles and there is no formal instruction in principles or tools for improvements. Lean and Six Sigma compensate by providing rich tool sets and improvement processes.

A company that integrates these three disciplines—by following the guidelines offered in Devane's book—will achieve the benefits of each as well as additional benefits from the combination. Here are some examples of hallmarks of a Lean Six Sigma/High-Performance Organization (LSS/HPO) implementation:

- **Speedy acceptance of new improvement concepts.** Because of team achievement, greater control over their work, increased job satisfaction and collective rewards, teams have a high motivation to meet goals and set new stretch goals. For this reason, in an LSS/HPO, teams are anxious to learn more about process improvement principles and tools. Teams tend to "pull" these practices rather than scenarios in LSSs in which they are "pushed" on the teams, and moved from organization unit to organization unit segment by brute force.
- **Less top management time required as the implementation progresses.** An LSS/HPO fosters high levels of motivation and a structure that provides for controls through metrics monitoring. Consequently, in an LSS/HPO implementation, top management is able to devote less time to shepherding the implementation than with standalone Lean or Six Sigma efforts.
- **Rapid widespread improvement.** Since HPOs by themselves provide only simple process improvements that don't capitalize on advanced statistical methods, with an LSS/HPO, people enthusiastically receive principles and tools to channel the energy they have for execution resulting from their motivation.
- **By simultaneously addressing culture, management practices, and process improvement, employees receive consistent messages they can act upon.** Management distributing to teams tool books such as the Memory Jogger™ with the expectation to use them in their improvement project without creating a supportive culture dooms the effort to failure. Simultaneously addressing the three above mindsets in an LSS/HPO dramatically increases the likelihood of sustaining new mindsets and processes for improvement.
- **Sustainability of results.** In many LSS implementations after a Black Belt moves on to another project there is often a danger of backsliding—to old methods and to old performance. This risk is mitigated in an LSS/HPO because people have set new goals for the improved process and are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to achieve them.

See how "hard" and "soft" come together to create an improvement process that is, in the immortal words of Goldilocks, "just right"? Devane uses a colorful analogy that elegantly sums up how LSS/HPO implementation works: that of a flower garden.

"Alone, Lean Six Sigma is like excellent seeds scattered across a concrete parking lot," he says. "And HPO alone equates to fertile soil that has been cultivated and is awaiting seeds. Obviously, a company needs both: the combination of excellent seeds planted in soil that nourishes the flowers that grow throughout the entire, cultivated garden. That's what LSS/HPO will do for you. All you need to do is maintain the fertile soil, tend to the existing flowers, and when appropriate, plant new seeds. Performance improvements—and your entire organization—will flourish."

About the Author:

Tom Devane, international consultant, author, and workshop leader, is the founder of Tom Devane & Associates. His broad range of clients includes Microsoft, Johnson & Johnson, StorageTek, and the government of South Africa. He is the coauthor and coeditor of *The Change Handbook* and a contributor to numerous books, magazines, and websites. Devane is a guest lecturer at Cornell University and Sonoma State University, and a three-time recipient of the Diamond Award for Teaching Excellence from the University of Denver where he is a member of the adjunct faculty. For more information, visit www.tomdevane.com.

About the Book:

Integrating Lean Six Sigma and High-Performance Organizations: Leading the Charge Toward Dramatic, Rapid and Sustainable Improvement (Pfeiffer/A Wiley Imprint, 2004, ISBN: 0-7879-6973-7, \$45.00) is available at all major online booksellers and www.pfeiffer.com or by calling (800) 956-7739. In Canada, call (800) 567-4797.