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# Looking Forward Using Lean Six Sigma in Navy International Security Assistance: The Next Step

By  
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By all accounts, the Navy International Program Office (NIPO) has a healthy and active Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) Program. Dating back to 2005, appropriate resources have been dedicated to build a successful CPI Program. The program enjoys executive leadership backing, full time Lean Six Sigma Black Belt support, and project sponsors willing to execute projects and commit to change management. Now that the program is operational and has been working for several years, the questions have changed from “How” and “Why?” to “Where do we go from here?”

NIPO built its CPI Program around Lean Six Sigma (LSS) principles, emphasizing Lean efforts to improve cycle time and reduce costs in its transactional processes and focusing on eliminating variation with Six Sigma. Roughly 12 percent of NIPO employees are trained CPI practitioners. This includes black belts and green belts who lead project teams and are mentored by a black belt deployment champion. These belts have successfully worked projects in areas from Case Reconciliation Reviews to Printer Cost Reductions and from Inter-Division Communication to NIPO Training Coordination.

One particularly successful project kicked off as a response to offset a top-line budget reduction handed down to NIPO. The NIPO team initiated a series of Kaizen Rapid Improvement Events to explore ways to offset a \$350 thousand reduction in funding for three technology security process areas (foreign visit, export license, and disclosure requests). These Kaizen events were bundled into a black belt guided project entitled “Task Force 350.” After performing a project identification and selection workshop to pick the detailed process areas to work, three separate teams, each led by a great belt, met over a three-week period. The teams employed the full range of LSS tools, including value stream mapping, surveys, nominal group techniques, brainstorming, root cause analysis, and cause and effect matrices. The teams identified and eliminated redundant activities and improved the remaining process steps to offset the budget reduction while maintaining output rates. Based on the results of the Task Force 350 project, NIPO returned two work years to the Department of the Navy for higher priority needs.

NIPO, like many other Department of Defense (DOD) organizations, is having considerable success applying the principles of LSS to its internal processes. It, like its counterparts across DOD, has a well trained cadre of CPI practitioners throughout the organization who have achieved significant improvements in cycle time and financial benefits. However, as we continue to become more and more lean, we need to ask the question: When does my organization hit Lean Saturation?

That question demonstrates a common problem in CPI implementation; that is buying into the misconception that CPI is a destination. Too often we achieve initial success; we post the certification on the wall, update our resumes, then get back to business as usual. On the contrary, CPI and LSS are toolsets we must use continually to better meet our customers’ needs. It is a culture that is created within an organization by which we solve our organizational problems systematically, producing real results in a financial and readiness sense. But it also is a way of taking advantage of opportunities

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as we face evolution in our product lines and the rapid acceleration of technology. Consider the auto industry, the consumer continually demands the best and most innovative features in cars. When car companies decide that they have achieved an “end state” in their car designs, we see them disappear from the market. As long as our customers seek better products, faster and at reduced cost, and as long as the American taxpayer demands improved stewardship of their dollars, we must continually assess and improve our business processes. Lean Six Sigma must be viewed as a culture we create and a means to an end, not a final destination.

Around DOD, organizations are speaking a common language of process improvement. What started as grass roots improvement tools at depots and local commands has become a standard practice with the recent release of DOD Instruction (DODI) 5010.43, *Implementation and Management of the DOD-Wide Continuous Process Improvement/Lean Six Sigma (CPI/LSS) Program*. Now that the ground work is set, organizations must reach out across organizational lines to better meet customer demands. “Leaning” one organization and declaring success is analogous to adding the most fuel efficient Goodyear tire to a 1967 Chevelle and expecting top-notch fuel efficiency. It is going to take a system-level solution to reach the right end state.

Within the international security cooperation arena, our value stream encompasses many different processes performed across many different organizations. In the Navy, our value stream reaches out to an extremely diverse supply chain. NIPO reaches out to the seven major Naval Systems Commands (SYSCOMs), and in turn they link our value stream to the industrial complex including aircraft manufacturers, ship yards, electronics companies, weapons suppliers, and other commercial entities. Each SYSCOM has different and often complex internal processes for providing security assistance outputs. NIPO and the SYSCOMs receive direction from various policymakers and stakeholders who are the driving forces of this value stream. While many of these organizations have “leaned” their internal workings to some extent, the value stream as a whole has plenty of room for improvement. This will be the next challenge for the CPI community.

Once we begin to view this conglomeration of agencies and offices as a value stream, we can begin to work process improvement as a whole. We plan to do this by linking Lean champions, leaders, and practitioners together. The Navy has charted the Sea Services Security Assistance Council (SSSAC) to examine issues that cross organizational boundaries. The council recently asked that Lean champions from each international assistance organization represented by the SSSAC begin to collaborate on a regular basis. This group will charter, staff, and undertake LSS Projects that affect all member organizations. NIPO facilitates this group, referred to as the Navy International Lean Six Sigma Working Group. This group will provide transparency and project replication opportunities across organizations and will undertake projects that would not be feasible without membership from multiple organizations.

A key enabler to the flow of CPI information across organizational lines is the Navy’s Continuous Process Improvement Management System (CPIMS). CPIMS is a web-based database that records, tracks, and reports all Navy project and practitioner data in one central location. CPIMS is based on the Power Steering software application and has been the Navy standard for several years.

Beyond the basic capabilities of tracking status and reporting information, CPIMS holds a wealth of knowledge on projects completed across the various components of the Navy. It is the central repository for CPI project data, ideas, templates, and other tools. Prior to undertaking a new project, NIPO green belts are asked to locate and research similar projects in CPIMS to find lessons learned, benchmark data, and identify possible project replication opportunities. While few project replication

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candidates can be considered “plug-and-play,” many completed projects provide a solid foundation for improvement and possible collaboration opportunities in the community. This type of pre-project research significantly reduces the time and effort of projects and events and should be considered a community best practice.

One example of CPIMS usefulness is a NIPO project targeting cost reductions in document printing and duplication. At first appearance this seems like a rather benign project; however, upon further inspection, the funds allocated to printing and copying approached \$1,000 per employee. Finding several similar projects within CPIMS, it was clear there was a compelling business case; and NIPO launched a Kaizen Rapid Improvement Event. This event charter replicated a project completed by Naval Air Station Cherry Point. The Kaizen team, using the Cherry Point project as a foundation, worked through an accelerated Lean Six Sigma Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control (DMAIC) process and to create its own recommendations for cost reductions. While careful not to jump to conclusions, the team was able to reap similar project savings in two half-day working sessions as opposed to the ten months it took to work through the full DMAIC process. Thanks to the hard work of the Fleet Readiness Center (FRC) East team and the common project documentation available in CPIMS, the financial benefits were realized with little additional NIPO investment.

The foundation has been laid for better communication within the Navy’s international security assistance value stream. Practitioners are using CPIMS to share ideas, data, and lessons learned. Now that these initial steps have been taken, we can now work to close the gap between organizations as products, services, and information flow through the value stream. In a business that is in all senses of the word “global,” we must accelerate our business model to keep pace with the constant flux of our world. To meet our mission, we will continually improve ourselves to meet our mission today, tomorrow, and into the future.

### **About the Author**

Jeffrey Brewer is the Lean Six Sigma Deployment Champion and Blackbelt at the Navy International Programs Office (NIPO). His responsibilities include providing oversight of NIPO Lean Six Sigma Projects, guiding and developing NIPO green belts, and ensuring NIPO Lean Six Sigma efforts are aligned with Navy and NIPO priorities. Prior to working at NIPO, he lead improvement efforts as a blackbelt at NAVAIR and has a background in Aircraft Combat Survivability.