

What's NEXT after PMP ?



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What's NEXT after PMP® ?

This question comes to every PMP's mind within months after a project manager passes the PMP® certification exam.

When a project manager sees several courses in the market to choose from to enhance his or her skill and to earn PDUs, one is really in a quandary to choose the best. While PMBOK(r)Guide can help approach the project at macro-level (on-time, within-budget), project managers need a course that not only offers value-for -money, but also equips them to make improvements at micro-level, i.e at the process level.

Lean Six Sigma is one such course that can offer the next "desired" skill expected of PMs and also can offer some Professional Development Units (PDUs) to maintain your PMP® status depending on the service provider.

Why Lean Six Sigma skill is needed for a PM ?

Lean Six Sigma is a structured and proven process improvement methodology. Jack Welch of GE said: "Six Sigma changed the

DNA of GE...". Reports claim GE saved more than US\$ 5 billion cumulatively by implementing Six Sigma ACROSS the company. Six Sigma training / certification was made almost MANDATORY FOR ALL MANAGERS AND EXECUTIVES, some opine.

Project Management, according to the PMBOK(r)Guide-5th edition, involves implementation and integration of 47 processes. Each process is structured in terms of its Inputs, Tools & Techniques, and Outputs.

What PMBOK(r)Guide does not address is "how to reduce variation, defect, waste in a process and increase the speed of each process ?" How sure are you, as a PM, that the processes you manage are efficient and lean?.

For example, if you take three project team members, ask them to estimate the cost of an activity, it is probable that all three of them will come out with different estimates and at different times. Cost of estimate (effort taken to estimate) can also be highly varying amongst the team members, meaning one may take 15 hrs, another 20 hrs and the third may take 7 hrs. Why the three team members take three different efforts for the same activity's cost estimate?. Such variation clearly demonstrates the difference in the way this estimating process is managed these three members. Customers notice variation in performance more than the shift in the mean.

Is my project management process Stable & Capable ?:

A process is said to be *stable* when all its outputs are within the control limits or, in another way, the process suffers only from variation due to random causes and not due to special causes.

A process is said to be *capable* (short-term) when all its outputs are capable of meeting the customer specification limits or, in another way, the process' outputs fall within the tolerance limits. Process "stability & capability" are the things project managers have to worry about next. Are my project management processes lean, stable, and capable?

How good is your data-based decision competence?

Every project generates lots of data. Data is generated and processed reported, and stored in various formats. They are usually available in the form of work performance data (% progress, EV, Actual Cost,etc), work performance information (CV, SV, CPI, SPI, TCPI etc) , and work performance report (status reports, forecasts). As a PM are your decisions based on the past performance data or your personal intuition or hearsay or expert judgment. Any claim or decision not supported by past performance data is not likely to be approved or pursued by the client or your own sr.management in the near-future.

For example, many PMs may be at a loss while trying to answer the following practical and useful question posed by senior management or client to them.

A Practical Question :

An IT or Construction Project, in a particular domain, has a mean critical path of 12 days & standard deviation of 1 day as observed from historical information. What is the probability that the next project in the same domain will be completed within 13 days if more or less same contractual & enterprise environmental conditions

are ensured.? Any client or senior manager would be interested in knowing the answer as it gives them immense power in deciding future course of action. Can a project manager afford to say "I don't know"?. Well, it depends on where you want to be next. However, the answer is 84%.

It requires a good amount statistical knowledge about probability distributions, esp. normal distribution. Most process outputs, in real-life, follow normal distribution and a PM's understanding of the characteristics and properties of a normal distribution and other distributions (such as beta, triangular, binomial, Poisson etc) is of immense importance in today's project management world of volatility and uncertainty .

To Control Y or X ?

Six Sigma is a structured, statistics-based process improvement methodology that helps PMs handle such practical project scenarios as explained above.

Generally, project managers control the outputs (Ys) instead of the inputs (Xs). Indeed, it should be the Xs that should be controlled by PMs, not the Y. Why?

Should I select a supplier based on the traditional Yield or DPMO ?

How can I mistake-proof my process?

Is my product (process) a Robust product (process)?

Lean Six Sigma answers these and other questions related to managing processes and products, in general, project management processes, in particular.

To sum it up, An inefficient process will still produce inefficient outputs even if managed by an experienced and/or certified PM until the process is made efficient (lean, stable and capable).

In today's highly competitive world, a PM must make all his / her project management processes lean, stable, and capable to sustain (remain competitive) in the market.

Those who think that a certification in project management will be the end to all their project problems are far short-sighted and those who synergize the strengths of project management and lean six sigma are headed to become the future leaders in their domains. It's high time every project manager embarked on his or her Lean Six Sigma journey to reap the benefits of Lean Six Sigma in their projects.

Panama Canal picture courtesy:
www.canalmuseum.com

About the Author:

The author, Ondiappan Arivazhagan "Ari", is a Honors Graduate in Civil / Structural Engineering from University of Madras. He is a certified PMP, PMI-SP, PMI-RMP from PMI, USA. He is also a Master Black Belt in Lean Six Sigma and has done Business Analytics from IIM, Bangalore. He has 30 years of professional global project management experience in various countries around the World and has almost 14 years of teaching / training experience in project management and Lean Six Sigma. He is the Founder-CEO of International Institute of Project Management (IIPM), Chennai and can be reached at askari@iipmchennai.com