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Lean Six Sigma

It's not just for manufacturing.

Motorola developed Six Sigma in 1986 to provide techniques and tools for process improvement. It subsequently used Six Sigma in all of its manufacturing operations. The name comes from the world of statistical modeling, where “sigma” denotes a measure of deviation. “Six sigma” indicated a process that produces only 3.4 defective parts per million and has since come to symbolize any system that strives for and achieves near perfection.

In the United States, General Electric famously adopted Six Sigma in 1995 and, today, the process is used by many manufacturers, having eventually evolved into the managerial concept of “Lean Six Sigma.”

Six Sigma focuses on process, quality and the elimination of variations and defects from products and services. Lean is a comprehensive strategy for eliminating waste and increasing

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the flow of products and services, separating “value adding” from “non-value adding” work by using well-known business and process-management tools. Lean Six Sigma combines these related strategies to deliver quality and efficiency. Lean Six Sigma also offers a broad set of tools to approach and resolve problems through a campaign of review and improvement. And it's not just for manufacturing.

Partnering with clients and utilizing Lean Six Sigma tools for patent application and prosecution process has produced significant improvements in cost and efficiency without reducing the quality of issued patents. Using various tools, including process maps and cause-and-effect diagrams, we can prepare a step-by-step analysis of how our client discloses inventions in-house and how the disclosures for those inventions get to us for processing.

Tasks or functions that are redundant are identified for modification or elimination.

For example, we were able to identify that documents were transferred to several of us within the firm from several individuals within a company in various forms and with inconsistent information. Each of us receiving the information would spend excess time decoding what was needed for our processes. Developing an in-house document transfer program for the company allowed our client to manage those transfer points efficiently by consolidating, modifying or eliminating various in-house steps and achieving significant cost and time savings. Similarly, we identified specific tasks involving information exchange between the client and our firm that significantly increased cycle time. Providing direct access to company systems reduced not only cycle time but also the opportunity for error.

These are just a couple of examples of modifications that led to significant savings for our client. Although these solutions may seem obvious, they were not. We needed to determine where the inefficiencies were happening and to put in place processes that would prevent our client from falling into old habits.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. The process requires concerted teamwork between the client and the legal team to evaluate in-house processes that may need to be eliminated or modified with the end goal of reducing time and cost. Lean Six Sigma tools have been proven to reduce costs and increase efficiency in the patent application and prosecution process. Why aren't you using it?

PRIYA SINHA CLOUTIER is counsel to the firm at Lane Powell, where she focuses her practice on the procurement, enforcement and monetization of domestic and international patents. She is registered to practice before the United States Patent and Trademark Office and has a Yellow Belt certification in Legal Lean Sigma® and Project Management. Reach her at cloutierps@lanepowell.com or 206.223.7022.