

**The Expanding Role of the Quality Assurance Professional in the  
Process Improvement Arena**

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As companies strive to remain competitive in today's fast paced world, Quality Assurance professionals are being invited to step outside their traditional role within the industry and participate in process improvement initiatives. The QA professional adds value to process improvement initiatives by being involved in the up-front review of the process through implementation of the changes, ensuring the quality of the product/service is not sacrificed as processes are streamlined.

Lean Six Sigma is recognized as one of many successful process improvement methodologies within the industry and offers a variety of process improvement tools.

One Lean tool known as the "Eight Wastes"<sup>1</sup> identifies eight potential sources of waste that may impact a process. They can easily be remembered by the acronym TIM WOODS.

- **T**ransportation (moving people, products, information)
- **I**nventory (storing excess supplies, documenting ahead of requirements)
- **M**otion (excess movement, poor ergonomics)
  
- **W**aiting (for parts, information, approvals, delays caused by shortages)
- **O**ver production (making more than is required)
- **O**ver processing (adding more value than the customer is paying for)
- **D**efects/Rework (scrap, incorrect documentation, repeating the same task)
- **S**kills (under utilizing staff capabilities, delegating tasks with inadequate training)

By determining if any of these sources are apparent in a process, it is possible to target them in order to eliminate waste, reduce process cycle time and improve quality by reducing the number of error opportunities.

Another Lean tool, the "5S System"<sup>2</sup>, can be utilized for streamlining/maintaining a process and would be useful in revamping a storage/inventory process.

**Sort** (eliminating unwanted items/storing wanted items)

- Removes waste/gains space

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**Set in Place** (arranging/indexing items)

- Expedites retrieval

**Shine** (keeping areas clean/organized)

- Helps identify abnormal conditions

**Standardize** (performing processes in a consistent manner)

- Prevents recurrence of problem

**Sustain the Culture** (encouraging continuous improvement of practices/processes)

- Creates good habits

These are only a small sampling of the tools utilized by Lean Six Sigma. If you are intrigued by the challenge to step outside your traditional QA role and delve into the world of process improvement, take the plunge. You will be pleasantly surprised at the opportunity for change that awaits you.

*Perfection may not be attainable, but if we chase perfection we catch excellence .....*

*V. Lombardi*

References

1. Bellamy, Stewart. "8 Wastes of Lean." 09 Nov. 2005. i Six Sigma. 27 Sep. 2009.  
[http://www.isixsigma.com/dictionary/8\\_Wastes\\_of\\_Lean-915.htm](http://www.isixsigma.com/dictionary/8_Wastes_of_Lean-915.htm)
  2. Productivity Press Development Team, 5S for Operators: 5 Pillars of the Visual Workplace (Portland, Oregon: Productivity Press, 1996).
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