Fostering a Commitment to Improvements

*By **Deborah Hopen**, Deborah Hopen Associates Inc., and **James J. Rooney**, ABS Consulting*

Generating sustainable improvement is the key goal of the lean Six Sigma (LSS) method. The control phase focuses on transitioning the solutions that were validated during the improve phase to counteract the root causes identified in the analyze phase from the project team to the process owners. If the foundation hasn't been developed adequately and the transfer isn't planned and implemented judiciously, this can be a challenging handoff that incites a variety of negative reactions.

Process of transition

Ensuring that a proven solution will be carried out successfully over the long term requires clear supporting documentation, such as standard operating procedures and process maps. Training and control plans also are necessary to describe how the process will be monitored, what triggers indicate the need for remedial action, and what the appropriate responses should be. All of this information is developed by the LSS team and passed to the process owners, who are expected to adhere to the new process.

The pamphlet, "Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change," defines the terms "change" and transition:

- "Change is situational: the new site, the new boss, the new team roles, the new policy.
- Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external; transition is internal."[1]

In 1969, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-American psychiatrist, described a five-stage model on grief that she had developed based on interviews with terminally ill patients.[2] Since then, her model has been adapted to describe the process of more generalized reactions to transition, as shown in Figure 1. The key here is to understand that the initial reactions to proposed changes often include negative emotions, but these can be transformed to a deeper understanding of the situation and, ultimately, complete integration into habitual practice over time.

Generally, it's considered useless to attempt to eliminate any of the stages; therefore, when working with process owners to assume responsibility for an improved process, the approach should be to encourage movement toward the acceptance and experimentation stages as quickly as possible. In other words, expect some initial shock, denial and emotional responses when the need for change is first announced, but work with the process owners to engage them in the actual application of the new process, which will shift their focus toward more favorable reactions.

Involvement and ownership

Obviously, involving the process owners in the transition is an important strategy for building their commitment. All too often, LSS teams wait until the control phase to initiate in-depth discussions of the required change. Sincere efforts are made to update process owners on the history of the project, but, in most cases, they are expected to get on board at the end of one session.

For those who grasp the need for the change quickly based on their knowledge and prior experience, this may be a feasible timeframe. For those who harbor doubts or disagree with the pro-

Figure 1. **Stages of transition model**
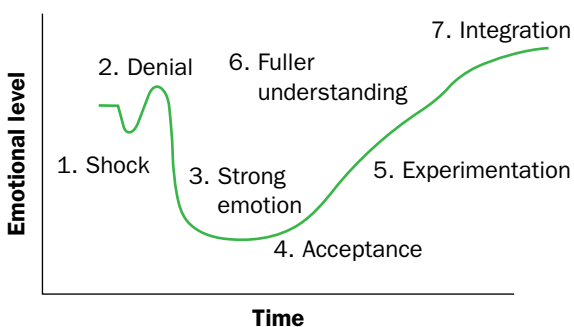
posal, however, more time may be necessary to stimulate acceptance. Mandating acceptance is not the answer because it is more likely to generate active resistance than begrudging acceptance.

This is one reason why conducting a stakeholder analysis that includes the process owners during the define phase and developing a communication plan that keeps them abreast of the project's progress throughout each phase are critical to success. There is no need to wait until the control phase to begin engaging the process owners.

Although the team is officially accountable for following the define, measure, analyze, improve and control (DMAIC) phases, here are a few ways the process owners can become involved earlier, make significant contributions to the project, and be ready for the control phase when it actually arrives.

- During the define phase, take time to review the baseline data that supports the need for the project with all of the process owners. Ask them to share their observations regarding the historical operation of the process. Don't just conduct a discussion; record their inputs and incorporate them into the project's documentation. Analyzing this feedback to create Pareto charts or other graphical displays is an even more powerful way to demonstrate that this qualitative data was highly valued.
- *Gemba* is great for becoming familiar the process and developing a suppliers, inputs, process, outputs and customers diagram or high-level process map. When the more detailed process map is developed—particularly the swim lane version—the hands-

on participation of the process owners is essential. This does not mean having them review the team's version of the map; it means having the process owners work interactively with the team members to create the map. This fairly simple approach eliminates much of the potential debate that can occur if the process owners see the process map later in the DMAIC process and feel it does not reliably portray the real-life process.

- When the fishbone diagram is drafted by the team, let the process owners add to it and even reorganize the levels of relationships if they feel that is necessary. Do not, however, let them eliminate any suspected causes. In other words, use a two-step process for finalizing this diagram that begins with the team members and ends with the combined efforts of the team and the process owners. This approach is more likely to provide a diverse and comprehensive set of potential causes for consideration.
- Work interactively again using a prioritization tool to determine the key contributors for further investigation. If the process owners are comfortable that the highest-priority root causes will be validated, they will be ready to accept the need for changing the process to address them.
- Brainstorming potential solutions and planning the pilot and designed experiment to test their efficacy is another task that can benefit from the process owners' perspectives. At the end of these discussions, process owners usually will be willing to help team members gather and record the actual data when the

proposed solutions are tested.
- Of course, process owners also can assist with data analysis and interpretation at this point, as well as reviewing and recommending improvements to transition documentation.

No surprises

If actions such as these are taken throughout the project, the process owners will not feel as surprised when the improved process transitions from the team to them.

At first, these approaches might seem too time consuming and seeming to increase the complexity of the team process. It is not the intention here to expand the size of the team or undermine its authority.

Instead, the idea is to treat the process owners as valuable resources throughout the project so that they gradually and systematically accept the improved process, thus shortening the time required for full-scale implementation and enhancing compliance as needed to generate sustainability. σ

REFERENCES

1. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change,* Addison-Wesley, 1991, p. 3.
2. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying,* Macmillan Co., 1969.

DEBORAH HOPEN is the owner of Deborah Hopen Associates Inc. in Federal Way, WA. She has a bachelor's degree in applied science, pulp and paper technology from Miami University in Oxford, OH. As a past president and chair of ASQ, Hopen is an ASQ fellow and the editor of the Journal for Quality and Participation.

JAMES J. ROONEY is director of Department of Energy programs and director of quality and lean Six Sigma services at ABS Consulting in Knoxville, TN. He has an MBA from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Rooney is a past chair of ASQ and holds several ASQ certifications.