



Case Study

Re-assessing social services work processes – an opportunity for major improvements and cost-savings

▶ UK-Based Local Authority

Summary

➤ **Challenge**

System bottlenecks and defects – in total, around 20 possible root causes.

➤ **Root Cause**

The team assessing customer needs (hand-rails, stair-lifts, ramps etc.) was subject to a high level of inappropriate contacts

➤ **Output**

Eliminate Reduce numbers of inappropriate contacts and time taken to process appropriate contacts.

➤ **Results**

Annual notional saving of £27k



› Case Study

Lean six sigma



Reassessing social services work processes – an opportunity for major improvements and cost-savings

Overview

Local Authorities have a hard job to do these days, especially with on-going budget cuts and increased workloads on often overstretched personnel. However, major improvements can be made if systems can be streamlined and optimised in terms of efficiency, minimisation of task duplication, and better working methodologies. This case study shows the dramatic improvements that can be effected when lean6sigma principles are applied to Local Authority operational processes.

Define

- › 5% budget reduction in Adult Social Care demanded increased operational efficiencies.
- › When team helping people live independently received contacts, each required a home visit.
- › This caused unnecessary work, duplication and wasted effort, so a target of 50% reduction of weekly inappropriate contacts was established.

Our client was a UK-based Local Authority – and, like many other Local Authorities, it was facing significant reductions to its funding. In particular, the Adult Social Care department was facing a 5% budget reduction in the upcoming year; consequently, it needed to increase its efficiency and maintain (or, preferably, improve) its services in such financially challenging times.

The department wanted to examine the process of referrals made to its Initial Access Team (IAT). By offering its clients aids and adaptations (such as hand-rails, grab-rails, shower seats, stair-lifts and ramps), the IAT team could help many people maintain their independence, whilst also ensuring that they could continue to live independently.

IAT service-users were able to contact the Customer Liaison Office (CLO) and request support – and while not all referrals were appropriate, every such referral resulted in a home visit and an individual client assessment. This caused unnecessary work, duplication and wasted effort, dramatically reducing the department's capacity to complete value-adding assessments. The department received an average of seven inappropriate contacts per week - and so a 50% improvement target was established.



Measure

- Process Flow Diagram was completed, so all appropriate departments could understand and agree these processes.
- Resultant understanding identified that causes of current inefficiencies were unknown.
- Therefore manual data-capture exercise gathered information required to identify inefficiencies.

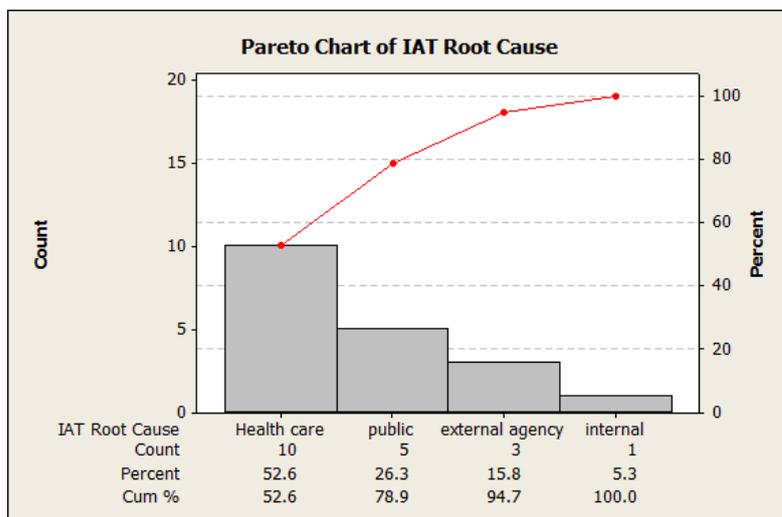
Analyse

- Data revealed 7 inappropriate contacts per week.
- Over a 3-week analysis period, 52% of inappropriate contacts were from healthcare professionals.
- For each inappropriate contact, time taken to complete each processing tasks was measured.
- By analysing how this time was divided between managers and assessors, the cost of each inappropriate contact could be assessed.

To understand the IAT's problems in more detail, the lean6sigma project team needed to ensure that all appropriate Local Authority departments knew (and were in agreement with) the current process – so the project team began by completing a Process Flow Diagram; this showed the presence of a range of working processes, such as decisions, hand-offs and re-work loops.

Having understood these processes, the lean6sigma project team established that the root causes of current inefficiencies were currently unknown. For example, *where were the inappropriate contacts coming from? How many inappropriate contacts were made? And how much time did they consume?* Since this data was not readily available, the solution was to create a manual data-capture exercise to gather such information. The project team spent a month recording where inappropriate contacts came from, how many inappropriate contacts there were - and how long it took to process the requests.

The data was revealing; it showed that, on average, there were seven inappropriate contacts per week (the operational definition of an 'inappropriate contact' was 'anything that did not affect independent living'). During the sample period (3 weeks), there were 19 inappropriate contacts made to the CLO team, 52% of which were generated from healthcare professionals;



Every time an inappropriate contact was made, the lean6sigma project team recorded how long was spent on the various activities required to process the application. These activities included administrative tasks such as entering key information into a database, travelling to and from residents' homes to complete the assessment - plus a range of follow-up procedures. In total, each contact took just over three hours.



By examining how this time was split between managers and assessors, it was possible to determine the cost of each inappropriate contact. Furthermore, it was possible to assess the impact on capacity – so, if there were an average of seven inappropriate contacts per week, this equated to 364 contacts per year.

Improve

- **Systems improved and inappropriate contacts decreased.**
- **The Local Authority discovered the effectiveness of database-informed decision-making**
- **The Local Authority gained sufficient confidence to initiate a bigger project with the NHS.**

The project resulted in improved systems and a reduction in the number of inappropriate contacts. In addition, as well as achieving improved performance as a result of the project, the Local Authority also learnt the effectiveness of ‘database-informed decision-making’. Moreover, the Local Authority could present relevant external agencies with compelling information about their processes, and so bring about effective change. The Local Authority also gained sufficient confidence to embark on a much bigger, collaborative working project between the Authority and the National Health Service.

Control

- **Annual notional saving of £27K.**
- **Staff performance and efficiency improved, and met greater demands generated by more business.**
- **Lean6-sigma supported authority in new NHS project.**

As a result of work with lean6-sigma to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals received by two of Adult Social Services’ front-line teams, systems were improved to such an extent that they generated an annual notional saving of £27K. In addition, increases in working efficiency resulted in improved staff performance, as well as enhancing the workforce’s capacity to meet the greater demands generated by an increase in business. Following this project, lean6-sigma was asked for support on a larger project (referred to in the previous paragraph); this is aimed at improving efficiencies across both internal and external teams – and work undertaken so far has demonstrated huge duplication of assessments, with consequent potential for considerable savings throughout the Local Authority’s Social Services Department.

