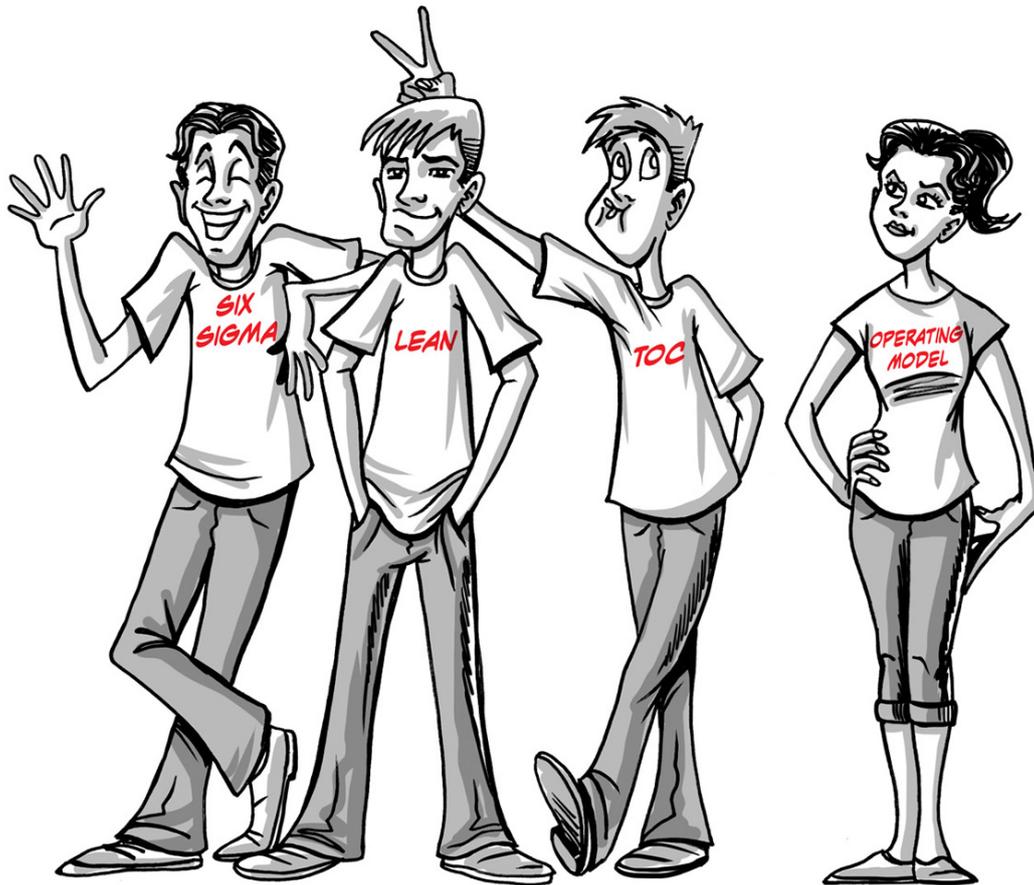


A Girl And Her Three Brothers



My mother used to laugh telling me how I kicked and screamed while entering this fantastic world. I am a twin and started the battle for dominance over my brother while still in the womb, frequently offering a left jab to his chin while floating in embryonic fluid. I love my brother dearly, sharing a very close bond. We are, however, very different people with our own uniquely crafted personalities and opinions. The same applies for my younger sister.

The improvement fraternity adopts and applies many different improvement models. The most prominent of this cluster would be the brothers Lean, Six Sigma, and Theory of Constraints. Although my knowledge and experience primarily focuses on the Lean methodology, I am certainly not hung up on Lean being the single, explicit blue print for the deployment of an improvement framework. I am far more interested in claiming the core essential ingredients of a broader range of approaches and then internalising these under a uniquely crafted, location-specific operating model. I prefer not to segregate Lean, Six Sigma, and Theory of Constraints as independent deployment approaches. It can be draining dealing with people who believe that their approach (mostly based on their training and work experience) should be the pre-eminent mechanism for developing organisational excellence. As a Lean coach, I place myself in the same mixing bowl, acutely aware that I may have a bias towards the methodology.

Companies such as Caterpillar, Textron, John Deere, Boeing, Nike, and Intel have successfully internalised their deployments, creating a vibrant culture of improvement over time that was born from within rather than bolted on from the outside. In doing so, they leveraged what they already had. What a tremendous waste of time and energy to not utilise that which already exists. By employing current good practice, the

organisational voice hollers down workplace corridors that prior effort is valued and necessary for future progress. Let's remind ourselves that the Toyota Production System evolved as a needs-driven evolution, molded and refined over time from within.

Patch on deployments, branded under Lean, Six Sigma, Theory of Constraints, or any other label, only serve to detract and further confuse, especially in mining. The language can be alien and can further amplify the change fatigue abiding like a disease within many mining companies. I am not devaluing the importance of having a deep knowledge of the three brothers. A comprehension thereof is vital and important. The point I make is that the fusing of this thinking into an existing culture should be done with tact. The best way I have seen this done is to allow the sister (operating model) to do the work.

I spent most of my early years in mining battling to convince people that Lean thinking was a universal, non-industry specific business philosophy. This was valuable time wasted. It detracted from the overall objective of embedding a vibrant culture of *respect* and *continuous improvement*. I now spend more time helping teams develop their own methods for driving excellence. I do, however, inject key principles and techniques of the three brothers into the conversation when required to stimulate thinking. The results have been fantastic. Seeing the smiles on faces, the pride of a group of people who have been involved in the creation of their own improvement model, is far more rewarding than being left with a grumpy bunch that feel disassociated from the process because it has been forced down their throats from outside.

The three brothers can be obnoxious and crude. Their work is best achieved when represented by their sister. She has just the right demeanor, just the right approach, and just the right empathy for the environment in which the brothers seek to ply their trade.

"Stay committed to your decisions, but stay flexible in your approach."

Tony Robbins