

The Chief Cause of Problems? Solutions



The other day I ran across a quote from Eric Sevareid who was a CBS news journalist from 1939 to 1977. He said, "The chief cause of problems is solutions." I do not know the original context of this remark, but it does appear to apply where I work. You would like to think that coming up with solutions gives you a leg up on the problems you face every day, but you wonder sometimes if we are making any headway here? In a very complex organization such as the Air Force Material Command, even with the very best intentions you have hundreds of managers and process play-

ers constantly adjusting, patching, and modifying the global business operations – the resultant consequences have a ripple effect on many other related business components throughout this command entity. Is anyone watching the real cost to our warfighters by the unifying impact of all these *solutions*?

The heart of Lean is the determination of value. The thing I like about Lean is the idea of stepping back and looking at the big picture of your business operation and making sure you understand which work activities are really making a contribution to the bottom line. Besides the obvious review of the critical work path – where we can focus on reducing waste or improving efficiency – what is also identified are the *targets of opportunity* for elimination, modification, and/or mitigation with regard to reducing the costs to executing your overall mission. The scope of your review can be either large or small; however, I encourage you to not only think about the core service or product you provide, but to also consider all the other surrounding business activities that affect your team. The aforementioned managers and process players trying to help can become another distraction from the mission. Lean provides the perspective and tools to focus, find, and justify the elimination of the non-added value *solutions*.

Jim York provides a similar discussion in *The Way We See the Problem Is the Problem*. Organizations often need to re-look at their situation from a totally new perspective to decide how to improve. This is not easy, but the ones that do it successfully are leaders in their field. In *Welcoming Software Into the Industrial Fold*, James M. Sutton discusses the benefits realized by implementers of Lean methods. We next get a discussion of Lean in practice with Paul E. McMahon's article *Are the Right People Measuring the Right Things? A Lean Path to Achieving Business Objectives*. Bas Vodde discusses one potential activity towards a Lean environment in *Measuring Continuous Integration Capability*. Dr. Alistair Cockburn completes this month's issue by bringing the specifics of incremental and iterative software development to the forefront. His article, *Using Both Incremental and Iterative Development*, defines these two methods, discusses their differences, and explains how they can be used together for everyone's benefit.

As we have used the Capability Maturity Models over the years, we believe in the value of process improvement efforts and our managers have been great champions. As we implemented our process improvement efforts that are now showing benefits to the warfighters, we have also had our stumbles along the way with false starts that resulted in more costs than benefits. The key to true process improvement is to set meaningful goals and then focus on activities that directly contribute to those goals. One goal as a sponsor of CROSSTALK is to provide readers with tools that will enable them to also provide the best value to the warfighters. I hope you benefit from the tools in this issue.

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