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Lean Six Sigma Initiative: Business Engineering Practices and Performance in Malaysian Automotive Industry

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ABSTRACT : *The automotive industry in various countries struggle to sustain a high degree of lean practice due to competitive market and customer pressure. Recently, Integration between lean and six sigma initiatives are increasingly implemented in the industry. The importance and relationship between lean practices and organizational performance has been highlighted in many studied. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship of Lean Six Sigma (LSS) practices and organizational performance in Malaysian automotive industries. A Conceptual model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has been proposed. This model will be used to study the relationship between LSS practices and organizational performance in Malaysian automotive industries. Based on the proposed conceptual model and reviewed, research hypotheses are being developed. The paper concludes with suggest future research work.*

Keywords – *Lean six sigma, quality initiatives, organizational performance, structural equation model, automotive.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In a competitive market, firms apply many quality initiatives such as Total Quality Management (TQM), lean, and six sigma and so on. As a matter of fact, World Class Manufacturing (WCM) achieved global competitive advantage through the use of their manufacturing capabilities as strategic weapon and providing world class performance element like productivity, quality, safety, environment, delivery, morale, flexibility, and cost (Hayes and Clark, 1985; Nachiappan *et al.*, 2009). Recently, automotive companies are moving toward lower cost of production, cheaper price, Just in Time (JIT) deliveries, and elimination of waste in any aspect of its operations and finally produce high quality product and better service to customer compared to competitors. Lean six sigma is considered as an important catalyst in this context (Basu and Wright, 2003; Sharma, 2003; Arnheiter and Maleyeff, 2005; Pepper and Spedding, 2010) for continually seek better performance and in turn against competitive advantage. Lean six sigma (combining two most important improvements) for businesses and organization that focus on operational excellence for continually seek better improvement in customer satisfaction, cost, quality, process, and speed. Nonetheless, after more than 25 years Malaysian automotive has been established, the performance of national car maker, supply parts by local suppliers still receive criticism, complaints, and various suggested approach to improve their product quality, operation management, and customer satisfaction. As a result, in order to improve the quality of automotive industries, Malaysian government has supported various quality initiatives, strategy and automotive policy such as vendor development program (PVD), zero defect, strategy partnership, and National Automotive Policy (NAP).

Thus, to help the National Automotive Policy (NAP) achieves one of their objectives which is to develop high value-added manufacturing activities in niche areas, further research is essential. By implementing LSS practices, local automotive companies will and have eliminated waste in operation activities such as to reduce defect, to reduce lead time, and reduce variation process, and also improve quality product and good service for customer satisfaction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last several years, more lean article and researchers demonstrated interest in describing and measuring lean practices by integrating with other practices and also investigated the effect of integrated approaches between practice and firm performance. For example, Flynn *et al.*, (1995) studied the relationship between JIT, TQM practices, and performance in three US manufacturing firm (electronics, transportation component, and machinery industries). In addition they also developed a survey instrument to measure both JIT and TQM. The finding result showed that JIT and common infrastructure practices had a positive effect on performance but the TQM had no significant effect. On other hand, (McKone *et al.*, 2001; Cua *et al.*, 2001) found that JIT, Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), and TQM gave positive effect on performance.

In addition, a limited number of empirical studies suggested the implementation of integrated lean practices and six sigma practices. However, the first empirical paper found in Shah *et al.*, (2008) argue that some lean practices have greater commonality with six sigma compared other practices. Their focus was to investigate and conduct a comparative study on lean practices, six sigma implementation and firm performance.

2.1 Lean Six Sigma Constructs

Many studies have investigated the composition of lean initiatives, the common barriers to lean implementation and critical factor for the success of lean and six sigma (Sakakibara *et al.*, 1993; Flynn *et al.*, 1995; Koufteros *et al.*, 1998; Boyer, 1996; Cua *et al.*, 2001; Shah and Ward, 2003; Li *et al.*, 2005; On, 2006; Zu *et al.*, 2008). Although the results of these studies are different that actually has discovered a common set of practices that is required for the success of LSS implementation.

In the interest of generating a distinguished construct, an analysis on numerous proposed construct is carried out. Table 1 shows a list of similar practices proposed by different authors for each generic construct. Then every construct is analyzed whether it is different or similar to the previously analyzed construct.

Table 1: Construct proposed from literature

Constructs	Related constructs
Leadership	Quality Leadership (Flynn <i>et al.</i> , 1995; Boyer, 1996), committed leadership (Cua <i>et al.</i> , 2001), and leadership, (On, 2006)
Structured Improvement Procedure	Methodology tool and application (On, 2006), and structured improvement procedure, (Zu <i>et al.</i> , 2008)
Quality information and analysis	Statistical process control (Flynn <i>et al.</i> , 1995, Shah and Ward, 2003), quality improvement efforts (Sakakibara <i>et al.</i> , 1993), and management by data (On, 2006)
Supplier Relationship	Strategic supplier partnership (Li <i>et al.</i> , 2005), and supplier development (Shah and Ward, 2003)
Just in Time (JIT)	Just-in-time (Sakakibara <i>et al.</i> , 1993), and time base manufacturing (Koufteros <i>et al.</i> , 1998)
Customer focus	Customer relationship (Li <i>et al.</i> , 2005), customer focus (On, 2006), and customer involvement (Shah and Ward, 2003)
Focus in metrics	Result (On, 2006), and focus in metrics (Zu <i>et al.</i> , 2008)

2.2 Organizational Performance Measures

Performance measurement is common in any firm, be it for measuring on financial aspect, non-financial aspect, or both financial and non-financial measurement. Based on that, Kaplan and Norton (1992) proposed multiple performance measure in balanced scorecard approach. These comprehensive measures of performance are based on four perspectives: financial, customer, business process/operation, and innovation/learning growth. Kanji (2002), suggested four key areas for measuring organizational performance, namely: to maximize stakeholder value, to achieve process excellence, to improve organizational learning, and to satisfy the customers. These four key areas are also consistent with the four perspective of Balanced Scorecard as documented by Kaplan and Norton (1996a).

According to Ittner and Larcker (1998), managers need to focus on both financial and non-financial measures to achieve organizational goals. The balance comes from tracking not only financial performance measure such as operating income, sales growth and sales revenue, but also non-financial ones as well. This is because non-financial measures are likely to facilitate organizational decisions and actions that support strategies based on the stakeholders need (Hoque and James, 2000). It has also been suggested (Kaplan and Norton, 1996a, 2001) that non financial performance measure helps managers to assess changes in the business environments, determine and evaluate progress towards the firm's goal, and affirm achievement of business performance. Table 2 shows the proposed measurement item organizational performance which are: financial, customer, internal business process, and innovation and learning growth.

Table 2: Organizational performance measures

Organizational Performance measure	Items	References
Financial	Increased operating income, Increased sales growth, Increased return-on-investment, Increased cash flow, Increased sales revenue, Reduced manufacturing cost, Increased economic value added, and Increased capital efficiency	Kaplan and Norton, 1996a; Hoque <i>et al.</i> , 2001; Mahapatra and Mohanty, 2007; Jusoh and Parnell, 2008; Bhasin, 2008; and Eker and Pala, 2008
Customer	Increased market share, Increased customer satisfaction, Improved customer retention rate, Reduced the number of customer complaints, Reduced the number of warranty claims, Reduced the number of shipments returned due to poor quality, and Reduced the number of overdue deliveries	
Internal Business Process	Improved material efficiency variance, Improved the ratio of good output to total output at each production process, Improved manufacturing lead time, Improvement of workers efficiency, Improved quality of the purchase item, Improvement of plant utilization, Improved relation with vendor, Reduced the rate of material scrap loss, Reduced the defect rate, Reduced setup and changeover time, Reduced cycle time, Reduction in inventory, Reduced redesign plant layout, and Reduction of forecasting errors	
Innovation and Learning Growth	Improved the number of new patents, Improved the number of new product launches, Improved quality of professional/technical development, Improved quality of leadership development, Improved new market development, Improved new technology development, Increased the level of Employee satisfaction, Increased employee training, and Reduced the level of Health and safety per employees e.g accident, absenteeism, and labour turnover	

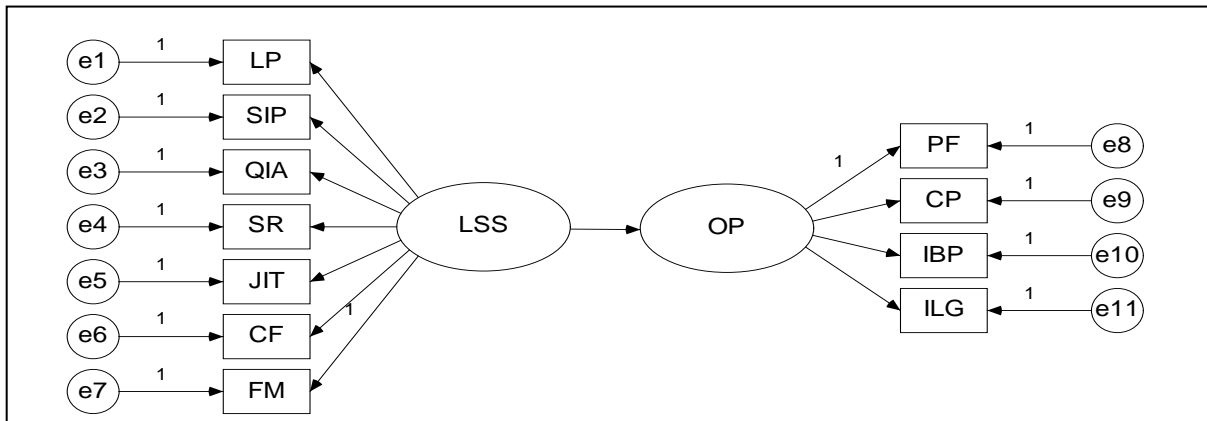
III. PROPOSED STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS MODEL BETWEEN LSS PRACTICES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The critical issues in lean and six sigma studies by previous researchers there is a need to integrate between lean, six sigma, and organizational performance. Shah and Ward (2003) used 22 individual lean practices and classification of lean practices as four bundles (1) JIT; (2) TQM; (3) TPM; (4) HRM. Thus, they also applied the same approach to integrate lean practice, six sigma implementation and firm performance (Shah *et al.*, 2008). In addition, there are also underlying 10 lean factors (Kannan and Tan, 2005) namely: supplier feedback, JIT deliveries by suppliers, supplier development, customer involvement, pull production system, employee involvement, continuous flow, setup time, SPC, and TPM.

On the other hand, Zu *et al.*, (2008) in their empirical studies explored the integration between quality management practices, six sigma and performance. They also developed a survey instrument which consisted of three out of four element suggested by (Schroeder *et al.*, 2008). They are role structure, structure improvement procedures, and focus on metrics.

Later on, organizational performance from Kaplan and Norton (1992, 1996a, b) followed suit. However, organizational performance was developed based on review of empirical study on lean and six sigma performance measure. This balanced scorecard provided a useful guidance for manufacturing, especially in automotive industry to evaluate and measure of lean in balanced scorecard way. The different lean performance metric was categorized under four perspectives, and this assisted the industry to evaluate lean and six sigma performance in balanced scorecard way from the angle of financial and non financial measurement perspectives (financial, customer, internal business process, and innovation and learning growth).

Based on comprehensive review of previous study, a conceptual model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has as presented in Figure 1. SEM is method of data analysis method which is increasingly used in operation management empirical studies (Shah and Goldstein 2006). SEM not only estimates multiple interrelated relationships but also has the ability to incorporate latent constructs into an analysis. A latent construct cannot be measured directly but can be approximated by observed or measured variable. The measured variables are obtained from respondents in response to questions of a questionnaire. The research model aims at analyzing the impact of the relationship between LSS and organizational performance for Malaysian automotive industries.



LATENT VARIABLE: LSS= Lean Six Sigma, OP = Organizational Performance

OBSERVED VARIABLE: Leadership (LP), structured improvement procedures (SIP), quality information and analysis (QIA), supplier relationship (SR), just-in-time (JIT), customer focus (CF), focus in metric (FM), Financial (FP), customer (CP), internal business process (IBP), and innovation and learning growth (ILG)

Figure 1

A proposed structural relationship research model

IV. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Most of popular lean improvement articles unveil the relationship between lean/six sigma practices and performance. However, according to Ittner and Larcker (1998), managers need to focus on both financial and non-financial measures to achieve organizational goals. Having a lean six sigma implementation, it realizes the improvement in the operation performance (such as scrap, rework, accuracy, inventory, machine line downtime, order process time, setup time, lead time, cost, defect, delivery, and productivity), customer metric (customer satisfaction, customer complaint, customer retention, warranty claim, and product recall) financial metrics (sales, market share, unit of cost manufacturing, operating income, profitability, and return on asset) and innovation metric (employee complaint, employee performance) impact on organization performance (Jayaram and Vickery, 1998; Fullerton and McWatters, 2001; Lee, 2002; Shah and Ward, 2003; and Nahm *et al.*, 2004; Challis *et al.*, 2005; and Hayya and He, 2002; Hsia, 2006; Narasimhan *et al.*, 2006; Matsui, 2007, and Pont *et al.*, 2008).

Zu *et al.*, (2008) report that six sigma practices is integrated with seven traditional quality management practices to affect quality management and business performance. The results find that six sigma element contributes to higher performance improvement. Other study by Shah *et al.*, (2008) explores the relationship between lean practices, six sigma, and firm performance. The finding also exhibits that the group of plants which implement lean and six sigma have higher performance than non implementers. However, Fullerton and Wempe (2009) in their study in US manufacturing come out with two sets of result. Firstly, firm lean practice has varied direct effect on financial performance. Secondly, the indirect impact of lean practices on financial manufacturing performance via mediating effect of non-financial manufacturing performance signals a significant evidence. In this study, the impact of lean six sigma implementation on the organizational performance will be investigated. A hypothesis regarding the relationship between TQM and organizational performance for both countries is formulated as follow.

H1: There is a positive and direct significant relationship between LSS implementation and organizational performance of Malaysian automotive industry

V. CONCLUSION

Recently, many researchers and practitioners look for implementation of LSS as their organization strategy for quality and performance improvement. However, no previous study had tried to investigate the critical success factors of LSS and the relationship between LSS practice and organizational performance, especially in automotive industry. Empirical study in Malaysian automotive industry will be carried out by using the proposed conceptual model.

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