

DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT SOFTWARE FOR LEAN SIX SIGMA?

The Importance of Data Analysis Software for Lean Six Sigma Deployment

Selecting software is one of the first and most important decisions Lean Six Sigma deployment leaders must make. Since software can either assist or frustrate practitioners for years to come, a judicious choice is essential. Software is a significant portion of the investment companies make in Lean Six Sigma both in financial expenditures and in the time necessary for implementation. It is wise to compare the brands of available software for data analysis in order to find the best fit for a Lean Six Sigma program and an entire company's data analysis needs. While it is imprudent to choose software that is limited in its scope, it is important to factor into the decision the complexity of the various software programs and the impact an overly complicated program will have on productivity. A poor choice will increase the time it will take to achieve proficiency and the time required to complete actual projects.

Here are several vital objectives to consider when selecting data analysis software for Lean Six Sigma deployment:

- **Compatibility** – PC or Mac? Is there a mobile PDA version for field use? How easily can data and reports be copied to Microsoft Office? Can data analysis done in other major programs be easily imported into the system?
- **Ease of use** – Since many people will be occasional users, this is critical. How familiar and intuitive is the appearance of the user interface? Are menus organized logically via a Six Sigma specific menu or tool bar? Does the software explain analytical results in plain language? Does it apply that explanation to automatically create a formatted report suitable for presentation or for archive? Is it easy to find the most common tools like histograms? Does it provide step by step directives within the analysis to guide users through procedures?
- **Versatility** – Many people, from beginners to experts, can (and should) use the software for diverse projects. Does the software support a wide range of designed experiments? Regression analysis? Time-series analysis and forecasting? Reliability analysis? Simulation and optimization? Does it provide immediate, automated Statistical Process Control (SPC) error alerts? Does the software cross language barriers and enable collaboration across borders by offering several languages, as well as the ability to easily switch between them?
- **Support** – If questions arise, how will they be answered? Is support by telephone, email or both? Are a knowledge base, web based training and webinar tutorials offered? Are user forums available? Are formal public and on-site training and consulting offered?
- **Cost** – Consider the cost, including periodic updates. Is the software cost effective predicated on years of use, feature richness and sensible pricing? Does the software present value by providing additional functionality that can be used in segments of business operations other than LSS programs, such as production and R&D? Shared network licenses may be more practical than individual licenses. Are networks and enterprise solutions available at an affordable price point? This is not the time to be frugal in terms of curbing access. Lean Six Sigma enables everyone in the company to make accurate, data-based decisions. Restricting the use of data analysis software to a few experts will limit the effectiveness of the deployment and prevent its use in other areas where data analysis is similarly necessary for quality and productivity.

The choice of software can make or break a Lean Six Sigma deployment. Remembering these important points will help managers to make the right choice when selecting statistical software and will maximize Lean Six Sigma process improvements.