



Innovating with Lean Six Sigma

Guest was Kimberly Watson-Hemphill

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Transcription of Interview

Joe: *Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 Podcast. With me today is Kimberly Watson-Hemphill. Kimberly is a globally known expert in the field of Innovation, Operational Excellence, and she is the founder of Firefly Consulting, and previously a partner at Accenture, and a Vice President of George Group Consulting. Kimberly, I would like to welcome you and excited to receive and read your new book, 'Innovating Lean Six Sigma.'*

Kimberly: Joe, thank you very much for the opportunity to talk with you today.

Joe: *Tell me a little bit about Firefly Consulting and yourself. Start with that elevator speech type thing.*

Kimberly: Sure! I'd be happy to. So I have worked in innovation and operational excellence for over the last 20 years. And I founded Firefly Consulting 8 years ago with a team who are also all experienced. Our goal is to drive significant results for our clients; whether that means significant financial results or empowering their employees to lead change in their daily work. On the Lean Six Sigma side, there is a set of best practices that really work. Our desire with our company and also with the new book is to help companies

get more out of their Lean Six Sigma deployments.

Joe: *I do remember your first book, 'Fast Innovation.' Did that start you on the innovation? I mean did that kind of lay the groundwork for your work in innovation today?*

Kimberly: It was a great opportunity to work on the 'Fast Innovation' book. It was a bit of a different book from this one and that it was broader in the innovation space. In addition to targeting executives, it was written more for an R&D or a new product development audience. But the idea with the 'Fast Innovation' books was similar and that we wanted to help people get more out of their companies' innovation processes. Companies are investing millions of dollars in research and development and not getting that much out of it.

Joe: *Your new book 'Innovating Lean Six Sigma,' where did you see the need for it or did it just kind of evolve, I guess?*

Kimberly: Right. So that's a very fair question. There are many books out there on the tools of Lean Six Sigma. I would say there is not much out there on a successful deployment. Important topics like leadership, strategy, metric, project identification and selection. Our audience for the book is both those who are just getting started or those who have been working on continuous improvement for awhile and want to help take their deployment to the next level.

Joe: *I thought you did a great job balancing between the two disciplines of Lean and Six Sigma and the combination of it, getting away from that notion where, 'Oh, Lean is about waste, and Six Sigma is about variation...' But how do you view the two working together?*

Kimberly: I think of Lean as primarily a toolkit around process speed and Six Sigma as really understanding your customer and leveraging data analysis tools. I do feel strongly that Lean and Six Sigma together are the best practice methodology for continuous improvement but that being said, you know, we all need to choose the best tools for our projects and our opportunities. I think practitioners sometimes get stuck in the midst of feeling like they need to use every tool, and that's when the approach really starts to bog down.

Joe: *What about innovation? I always think Lean is about doing, and Six Sigma is more rigid. Is there truth to that?*

Kimberly: Well, you know, there have been some well-known with the point of view that Lean and Six Sigma stifle innovation. I haven't seen that to be true. There is certainly an opportunity to be too rigid with a methodology which creates a number of problems. I have found it to be very helpful to have a framework for problem solving and also a framework for innovation. Most people don't do well with a perfectly empty canvas. People need some structure. People need a process.

Joe: *You talk about Lean Six Sigma, but what's the difference between the method you described and maybe like Design for Six Sigma, because that was kind of all the rage back in the 90's, right? When would I use one over the other or should I be throwing away Design for Six Sigma? How does that fit in?*

Kimberly: No, so Lean and Six Sigma is typically used for improving existing processes and Design for Lean Six Sigma is focused more on product and product design. If I wanted to compare and contrast the methodologies, I would say that Lean Six Sigma has more of

a focus on understanding the current processes and analyzing them. Design has more emphasis on the voice of the customer. It also has an emphasis on exploring design alternatives. The methodologies for sure have some overlap, but the design one works a little better in the new product and process design space than a more traditional Lean Six Sigma approach.

Joe: *If I'm going out and exploring a new product or exploring maybe a new product or a new market together, I'm really going out there, then Design for Six Sigma still has some relatively good value to it.*

Kimberly: You know, I feel that it does. Design for Six Sigma isn't new; neither is Lean Six Sigma, but it doesn't mean that they're not impactful. Organizations need a process for innovation and the Design for Six Sigma process I feel still adds quite a bit of value.

Joe: *How is this basic approach different than let's say design thinking then? Is there a remarkable difference or a Lean product development? Where does that fit in there? Is there a major difference between the two?*

Kimberly: There are a number of methodologies that all have some similarities and some differences. You mentioned Design thinking, Lean thinking. There is Agile, there is Rapid Startup, Lean Startup, and there are a bunch of different things. I think there are a lot of good methodologies, a lot of good approaches. In the design and innovation space, I feel that the key things are having a methodology for really understanding the customer needs whether or not they are already stated, and then having a methodology to go through and explore those different design alternatives, and there are a number of different ways that individuals or companies could approach that.

Joe: *One methodology doesn't necessarily leap ahead of the other. You alluded to this in your book a little bit, is that you talk about developing a maturity model in that chapter. So is it really understanding yourself maybe and what's going to give the best design characteristics and what you can handle a little bit in picking a methodology. Does that make any sense?*

Kimberly: Yes. We built a maturity model a few years ago based on a client request about how these types of programs tend to evolve over time. And you know, not everyone's goal is to be world class in all these areas, but we thought it would be helpful to set out at least a framework of what that would look like. You know you mentioned, big in the 90's, some of these methodologies have been here for awhile. An advantage of that is that we've seen how these work. We've seen from experience how these methodologies can really make a difference when they're deployed well, and we've also seen what doesn't work. So it puts us in a good position to help companies do it right.

Joe: *I remember this old project management saying from years ago and I don't even know where I picked it up from is that a lot of good ideas get lost because of a poor plan.*

Kimberly: Oh, that's for sure. I mean, we need a methodology. We need a methodology for design; we need a methodology for process improvement, and there's effort in putting that in place. You know we were doing an assessment at a client, a well-known Fortune 500 company and I was talking with the director, and one of our interview questions was if you had an idea to make your business better, what would you do with it? And he looked at me, and he laughed, and he said, I would keep it to myself. I just felt terrible. My heart sank when I heard that. But what it was a reflection of is if we don't have these processes

and systems in place, people aren't empowered to make their daily work better. They don't have a methodology to solve problems, to do things better, to design. And Lean Six Sigma and Design for Lean Six Sigma can help people and companies do that.

Joe: *And I go back, even Van Gogh had a process for how he painted, right?*

Kimberly: Some people think that process is the enemy of innovation. I don't think so at all. I think people need a framework. They need some guidelines. We don't want to be too rigid, but we do want to help people out.

Joe: *The book outlines some real practical approaches. I think from the Six Sigma standpoint; it may need a refreshing approach because Six Sigma seems to have lost some of its luster outside the quality field. Do you see that or is it poised for a comeback?*

Kimberly: Well, I think in the kind of quality arenas right now, I think Lean is seeing a bit more popularity with Six Sigma. The bad rep against Six Sigma is too rigid, too difficult; tools are too complicated. I would say that that depends on the deployment. There's no need to make this more complicated than necessary. If you have a very complicated problem to solve, perhaps those advanced analytical tools are useful and in that case, it's good to know them. But if not, we want to use the part of the methodology that is going to help us solve the business problems at hand. Whether that's basic tools or more advanced tools, we should use what is most appropriate. I would say that the Lean Six Sigma and the Six Sigma toolkit within that really has a lot to offer from a data analysis standpoint. We just need to be selective about how we use it.

Joe: *And that's what I like about your book is because it talked about Hoshin. It talked*

about different things of Lean without these overcomplicated ways of, oh, we have to follow this. As we talked about the Six Sigma, this rigid, structured and defined measure and so forth. You really did, and there were parts of it that I felt I'm reading a Lean book. But you mixed it well and you kind of, if I was trying to separate the two, you moved well very fluidly between them.

Kimberly: Well, thank you and our goal was not to write an overly technical book. It was to write an accessible book. And you know you mentioned Hoshin planning, so the back half of the book is more aimed towards experienced practitioners who are looking for new ideas, who are wondering what might be their next steps on strategy or next steps in uncovering the voice of the customer or in design. That was the purpose of the second half.

Joe: *People have Design for Six Sigma. They have Lean Startup, Design Thinking and all of these things. Is 'Innovating Lean Six Sigma' a different approach and if it is, why should someone follow this approach or should certain companies follow a certain approach based upon the culture that's within it? Can you touch upon that for me?*

Kimberly: Sure. I think each company will decide what is the best path for them, and there are lots of good options out there. I will also say that there is really need. There is still really a need for process improvement. There is really a need for best practices around process design and product design and innovation. And in the book, we're trying to bring forward the best practices in a practical and accessible way to do continuous improvement also with a little bit on design in a practical and accessible way, based on best practices. Are there other good methodologies out there? There certainly are, and I would never say that there aren't. But we've seen a lot of success with this approach, and I would

recommend it to businesses that are looking to go either to the next level on process improvement or in process or product design.

Joe: *If I'm an organization practicing Lean Six Sigma and things like that, I certainly would get value reading your book, right?*

Kimberly: I hope so. That was our goal.

Joe: *If I'm not a Six Sigma and don't have a group of green belts out there and things like that, will I still get value from your book?*

Kimberly: Well, that was the goal of the first half. You know, we didn't go into the what is Lean Six Sigma and what are the tools because there are so many books out there on that, so there are certainly plenty of resources. But if you don't know much about it, and you're looking to get started, that's the first half of the book. You know the first piece is the strategy. Why are we doing this? What are we hoping to get out of it? Big questions – who, when, what, why, how. It seems very simplistic, but it's very important. Often, the early questions that people think about, you mentioned the belt. Everyone knows the belts. How many belts do I need to train? That's not where we want to start. We want to start with what are our goals with this deployment? The beginning of the book is targeted more towards people who are new in the arena and giving them kind of those bigger picture questions to think about to get started. Then once you have decided on the strategy why we're doing this, you know the other things. What do we need from our leadership? How are we going to measure this? How are we going to get our good projects and some of those other important questions?

Joe: *We bring up this idea about belts and stuff. Is that still relevant today that we need to be training green belts? I mean I think that was probably one of the downfalls of Six Sigma is that we had to have for every hundred people, we needed one master black belt, two black belt, and 10 green belts or something.*

Kimberly: Right. You know the early founders of Six Sigma loved Karate, and that gives us the best legacy which gets mixed reviews, but it is what it is. It's a recognized professional certification. I think we might as well stick with the terminology and do the certifications that help people professionally. I think the real question behind that is on the scale of the deployment. The gray area that the company needs to decide is it needs to be big enough that it's going to be impactful. If your company has this idea and you want to implement Lean Six Sigma, you train one black belt, they do one project, that's just not going to have the scale to be meaningful which is the argument for the larger numbers. On the other hand, it needs to be manageable so that it can be successful. There's no point in putting a large deployment in if there aren't the resources to work on the project if the company hasn't invested in putting the infrastructure in a place that's needed to make it successful. We don't want to be big just to be big. We want to manage that to the appropriate size for the business and what they're really capable of handling. The tool sets there are good; I'm a passionate follower of Lean as well, but I think if we just go Lean, and we don't do anything on the Six Sigma side, we missed a data analysis toolkit that can be really helpful.

Joe: *If I follow the book, can I really take a project through completion by following the steps in the book or is it more of a high-level book?*

Kimberly: We try to be higher level on the deployment. The beginning of the book is the

strategy in bringing on board the leadership metrics, project identification and selection and some of those higher level things. We don't go too deep into the DMAIC methodology and the tools just because there are so many resources already out there. I was fortunate to have contributed to the George Group books; I don't know, maybe 15 years ago. Lean Six Sigma, Lean Six Sigma for Service, the Lean Six Sigma Toolkit, and those books are all still around and doing fairly well but I feel like they cover off on those bases. So we wanted to help on the deployment side and then offer a perspective too for experienced practitioners on some more advanced process that they might want to take if they feel that they would be applicable for their business.

Joe: *I noticed that you ended the book with talking about healthcare. Is that a large area of your work right now and does 'Innovating Lean Six Sigma' directly apply to healthcare?*

Kimberly: It applies very well to healthcare. We were in a bit of a dilemma with the book, having a chapter on healthcare, when we didn't have a chapter on any of the other areas that we worked. We didn't do other industry segments. We didn't talk about financial services. We didn't talk about oil and gas. We didn't talk about manufacturing specifically in a chapter. We did a whole chapter on healthcare because it is really an emerging area for continuous improvement. Because of the larger economic pressures on the healthcare environment right now in the United States and just how important of a field it is impacting patient care and people's lives every day, that industry is getting more and more interested in continuous improvement methodologies.

We're seeing lots of interest there in the last several years where 10 years ago, when they started in manufacturing and was breaking into service, you didn't see a lot of healthcare; now, we do, and our team just thinks it's absolutely wonderful because we're all patients of

the healthcare system, and it's so important, and we love to see it be done even better.

Joe: *You didn't mention this but is government playing a role now in innovating and with Lean Six Sigma? Is that another area?*

Kimberly. Yes. Yes, government. There are a number of successful case studies in the government which is wonderful. We are all taxpayers. We would all like the government to use our money more efficiently, better for our citizenry, and further many functions. So I think it's wonderful that the government has taken some steps into continuous improvement.

Joe: *Well, is there something that maybe I didn't ask that you would like to talk about the book or talk about Firefly Consulting?*

Kimberly: I appreciate your question on the healthcare. I would like to help get that message out there that this does apply to healthcare. It's interesting; I was in a conversation with some business leaders this fall that still weren't sure that this applied in service. I started on this in service in the early 2000's in the hospitality industry and financial services, and GE Capital had already been doing it for quite awhile in that space. So, it's been in service for a long time, but that word hasn't necessarily gotten out. Now it's getting more mature in the healthcare space, but I'm not sure that that word has gotten out broadly to the healthcare industry yet. These methodologies can really help healthcare.

Joe: *I think that when we start looking at that, what I'd really like , let's say with the government where you see it happening is more at local levels, it's coming up, and that's*

what makes me think it could sustain and work, rather from some edict coming down.

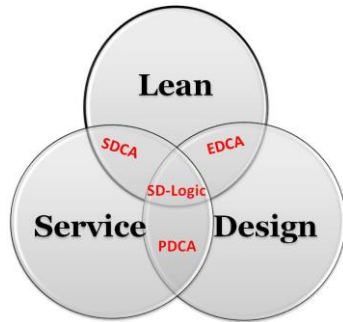
Kimberly: Oh, yes. Yes. I'm the technical chair for the Lean and Six Sigma World Conference, which just wrapped up in Orlando last week, and we had a number of city governments presented. And it was exciting; they made some big changes. It was fun to watch that.

Joe: *Oh no, that was the thing that was most important to me and of course, since I'm from Fort Wayne, we know that Fort Wayne was the original Six Sigma people.*

Kimberly: Oh yes. Oh, they were one of the early ones. Oh, that's exciting. I didn't know about that. You know I mean, I've been in this field for a long time and so has my team. Like I said, everyone has been doing this for 20 years. So, we're really in it because we want to make a difference. We want to make a difference. So it's exciting to see a local government take steps forward or a hospital or another healthcare institution in a way that can really make a difference. It's exciting.

Joe: *I think it is. I could go on. It's a good book, Kimberly. I was glad that I was able to read it and go through it. Tell me what's the best way for someone to contact you and learn more about the book.*

Kimberly: Absolutely. If you want to contact me personally, my email is Kimberly@firefly/consulting.com. We also have a Website for the book, innovatingleansixsigma.com.



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Joe Dager is President of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

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