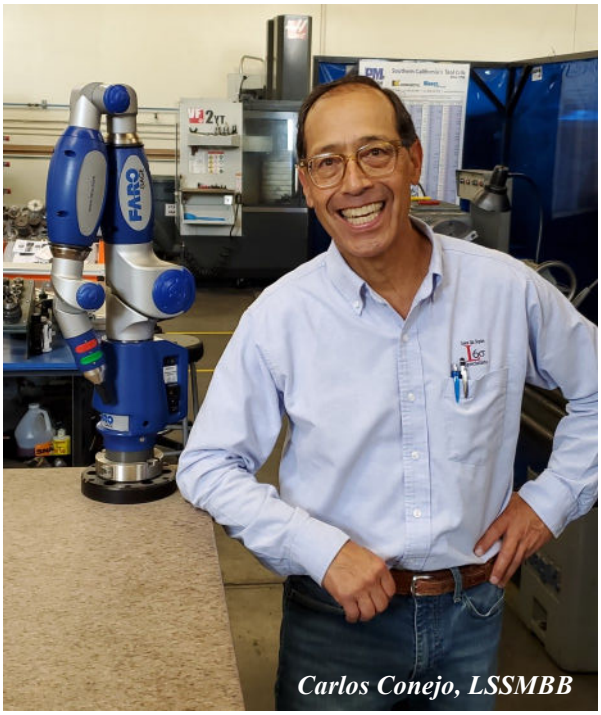
Creating The New Capacity

Kaizen: A Japanese term meaning "change for the better" or "continuous improvement," which has become an enduring business philosophy that goes back decades. Closely associated with the meticulous consistency of auto assembly lines, the "concept of kaizen encompasses a wide range of ideas. It involves making the work environment more efficient and effective by creating a team atmosphere, improving everyday procedures, ensuring employee engagement, and making a job more fulfilling, less tiring, and safer," as defined by Investopedia.

Carlos Conejo, CEO of Lean Six Sigma Specialists (LSSS) in Thousand Oaks, California, knows something about kaizen. The Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt has assembled a team of business management consultants who specialize in the methodologies to assist clients in every phase of business and organizational structure to optimize efficiency and consistency on every level.



Carlos Conejo, LSSMBB

Carlos Conejo, CEO of Lean Six Sigma Specialists — Master Black Belt — says businesses and organizations can easily battle back after COVID – "and even run better than ever before."

LSSS has the capacity to assist every type of client or project imaginable, from aerospace to candy making and from small governments to the United States Navy. Six Sigma is a highly respected management system created by Motorola's Bill Smith and Bob Galvan in the 1980s.

Six Sigma is focused on eliminating variation and putting procedures under stringent process control to result in "99.99966% of all opportunities expected to be free of defects. The levels of training required in the Six Sigma processes are "belts," patterned after the levels in martial arts. A master black belt in Six Sigma is the highest possible level, as it would be in Karate or other disciplines.

"Lean Six Sigma focuses on eliminating both variation and waste in any process," Conejo says. "There are eight to 15 major wastes but the 'classic wastes' are transportation, inventory, motion, waiting, overprocessing, overproduction, defects, and skills. Skills refers to not optimizing worker talents and abilities to their highest potential."

Conejo has endless examples of how he and his team of consultants have assisted companies, governments and organizations large and small to become more efficient, whether it's on an assembly line, a store floor, or virtual work life.

One example of Lean Six Sigma's efficiency is illustrated by a project it did for a company that makes plastic containers for Costco chicken and pies that involves a large thermo-form press. The time it took to set up the machine or change it to

a new job took two and a half hours and required five mechanics. LSSS reduced the process down to 30 minutes and two mechanics. This was a $10 million improvement for the company and it freed the other three mechanics for other tasks.

Conejo stresses that "lean" isn't "lean and mean" or about eliminating people. It's about doing more with the same employees, and not have them work as hard. It's more about creating new capacity.

One of the most intriguing projects Conejo did was with the Tulare Police Department in Central California. The objective was to reduce the time it took to book a DUI. Conejo consolidated six forms into one, coordinated with the county sheriff to balance the workload, and reduced booking time from three hours to about 70 minutes.

Similarly, Conejo's strategies have helped city parks and recreation departments consolidate lawn mowing of hundreds of acres from five days to four, leaving staff an additional day to do painting, plumbing and other maintenance.

Lean Six Sigma Specialists counts marquee names such as Southwest Airlines, Chevron, Dave & Buster's Restaurants, Neutrogena and Oakley as clients. And it recently added a new partnership that it believes will expand their value offerings: LSSS has become a partner of The Predictive Index (PI), a talent-optimization platform that combines psychometric testing and technology. PI has been a leader in the analysis of workplace behavioral tendencies for more than 60 years and LSSS has added the efficiencies to its consultancy offerings.

"We take a holistic approach to creating and developing an operational performance system and talent optimization that is critical to deploying a strategic plan – or roadmap – to the companies and organizations we work with," Conejo says.

"Coming back from a situation such as COVID demands that organization optimize on every level, which includes identifying the right talent, the ideal job match, and redeployment of talent within the company so we can transfer people's skills in the event downsizing is necessary or – as we've seen with some clients – they're exploding and you need the existing team members to wear new or many hats."

The science behind the PI has been the subject of more than 500 validation studies since its inception. The data, which has been in practice for 65 years, is consistent with accepted standards and guidelines that comply with Uniform Guidelines for Development and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures, American Psychological Association, Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, and International Test Commission and the European Federation of Psychologists Association.

"A scientific approach is developed not by accident, but by design," Conejo adds. "Many executives go by a 'gut feeling,' but that is very subjective, and the result is organizations with unhappy and disengaged employees, creating high turnover, expense and frustration for the executive level where the problem started."

This science may be more necessary than ever now and how will it continue to be as the world navigates the new normal with every type of business and organization that has been touched by COVID.

"Talent optimization is about setting up your organization for success by setting up your people for success," he says. "Talent optimization starts with a strong company culture, and as companies and employees are under tremendous stress, culture is a vital binder that keeps employees focused on the right objectives that tie back into the corporate strategies. And this is more important than ever in age of COVID."

As a devotee of efficiency, Conejo says accepting remote work as the new norm is "shepherding in an era that will be beneficial for everyone, save tremendous amounts of wasted time and be better for the environment. I am waiting for when Generation X finally gets to run the C-suite," he adds. "They are tech-savvy and open minded and the traditionalists will finally retire and we'll see a true cultural shift occur."

COVID has undoubtedly accelerated this shift and Conejo credits technology with being a great equalizer, particularly for small business. The companies and organizations that are able to survive should be able to emerge from this time with a greater ability to innovate.

"Remote work has leveled the playing field for everyone, including the small businessperson," Conejo concludes. "To compete in the new economy, we must be creative, strategically leverage every bit of technology available to us, and make it easy for the customer. Agility and responsiveness are the name of the game and the key differentiators going forward." — By Susan Belknapp, California Business Journal.

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