Nonprofit Leader Experiences in Sector-bending After Lean Six Sigma Training: Tension, Concepts, and Changed Behaviors

Beverly Codallos
University of San Diego, beverly.codallos@icloud.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.sandiego.edu/dissertations

Part of the Adult and Continuing Education Commons, Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Developmental Psychology Commons, Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations Commons, Finance and Financial Management Commons, Leadership Commons, Leadership Studies Commons, Nonprofit Administration and Management Commons, Nonprofit Studies Commons, Organizational Behavior and Theory Commons, Organization Development Commons, Other Business Commons, Other Engineering Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Digital USD Citation

This Dissertation: Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital USD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital USD. For more information, please contact digital@sandiego.edu.
NONPROFIT LEADER EXPERIENCES IN SECTOR-BENDING AFTER LEAN SIX SIGMA TRAINING: TENSION, TOOLS, CONCEPTS, AND CHANGED BEHAVIORS

by

Beverly Song Codallos

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2024

Dissertation Committee

Hans Peter Schmitz, PhD, Chair
Marcus Lam, PhD, Member
Sheridan L. Barker, EdD, Member
Leonard Perry, PhD, Member

University of San Diego
University of San Diego
School of Leadership and Education Sciences

CANDIDATE’S NAME: Beverly Song Codallos

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: NONPROFIT LEADER EXPERIENCES IN SECTOR-BENDING AFTER LEAN SIX SIGMA TRAINING: TENSION, TOOLS, CONCEPTS, AND CHANGED BEHAVIORS

APPROVAL:

______________________________, Chair
Hans Peter Schmitz, PhD

______________________________, Member
Marcus Lam, PhD

______________________________, Member
Sheridan L. Barker, EdD

______________________________, Member
Leonard Perry, PhD

DATE: March 8, 2024
Government, business, and nonprofit represent three distinct types of organizations governed by different legal frameworks designed to facilitate collective action (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990). The emergence of hybrid forms and increasing isomorphic pressures in the nonprofit sector (Bromley & Meyer, 2017; McCambridge, 2014) have challenged the traditional separation of organizational forms. This study explored the phenomenon popularized as sector-bending, “a wide variety of approaches, activities, and relationships that are blurring the distinctions between nonprofit and for-profit organizations, either because they are behaving more similarly, operating in the same realms, or both” (Dees & Anderson, 2003, pg. 16). This qualitative study examined the firsthand experiences of nonprofit leaders as they engaged in sector-bending by receiving training and certification in Lean Six Sigma (LSS) - a businesslike methodology traditionally deployed in manufacturing/for-profit corporations. By allowing nonprofit leaders to engage in a more reflective way, we better understand what is really happening on the front lines.

Findings indicated that some nonprofit leaders experienced tension over being driven by mission versus data which provoked personal growth and improved leadership skills. Adoption of LSS foundational principles and concepts (e.g. collect data before rushing to solutions) were found to have a longer-term utilization than the tactical LSS tools. Although the nonprofit leaders have yet to implement a thriving LSS culture in their organizations, they believe that LSS can be a source of financial stability. LSS was a positive experience and nonprofit leaders stay committed to the practice and training.

Keywords: Nonprofit, Leader, Leadership, Lean, Six Sigma, Sector-bending, Sector Blurring, Businesslike
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved family – Jose, Elijah, and Faith. Thank you for the encouragement and pride during my doctoral journey which kept me going. Thank you for understanding the late nights and weekends at the library that I will not miss.

To my dearest friends, who stood by me offering support and laughter. “Hustle up, Dr. B!”

To the rest of my family, whose love and encouragement have been a constant source of strength. I am fortunate to have you by my side. Thank you for believing in me and celebrating this moment together.

And above all, to God, the source of wisdom and strength. I pray that I will use this accomplishment to your glory.

This dissertation is a testament to the love, support, and understanding of my cherished husband, children, family, friends, and my Lord. Thank you all for being my pillars of strength.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my deepest gratitude to those whose contributions and support have made the completion of this dissertation possible.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to my advisor, Hans Peter Schmitz, PhD. Thank you for your guidance, expertise, and constant drive forward. In the end, you were right, “A good dissertation is a done dissertation.” I am fortunate to have had you as my professor and advisor.

I am thankful to the members of my dissertation committee:

Marcus Lam, PhD, I am especially grateful for your constant encouragement and belief in me. You always offered me words of encouragement that were truly appreciated – whether you knew it or not!

Sheri L. Barker, EdD, I will always be grateful for our lunch adventures and the consistent encouragement and mentorship that you generously shared with me over all these years. Your belief in me means the world.

Lenny Perry, PhD, I am genuinely grateful for the knowledge and skills I’ve gained under your mentorship. Thank you for including me and allowing me to be a part of this LSS expedition.

To the participants in this study, I am forever grateful to you for sharing your time and stories with me to make this possible. You all are the heart of this study.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 10

ORDER OF PAGES vii

LIST OF TABLES xiv

LIST OF FIGURES xv

CHAPTER ONE 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY 1

Background: Sector-Bending and Blurring 1

Examples of Sector-bending Found in the Field Today 3

Pressure Towards Sector-Bending 4

Understanding the Nonprofit Context 7

Self-governing Organizations 8

Nonprofits are Not Profit-distributing 9

Nonprofits are Private and Nongovernmental in Structure 9

Nonprofits are Voluntary 9

An Example of Sector-bending: Teaching Lean Six Sigma to Nonprofit Leaders 10

Overview of the Study 12

Context of the Study 13

Study Findings 14

Overview of Dissertation 14

CHAPTER TWO 16

LITERATURE REVIEW 16
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Round 2 Interviews</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round 3 Focus Groups</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Sources</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis of First Round of Interviews</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis of Second Round of Interviews</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis of Third Round of Interviews of Focus Groups</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Measures</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility and Confirmability of this Study</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR</strong></td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FINDINGS</strong></td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Organizations</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Participants</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>María</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genevieve</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jenna

Jazmine

Anne

Results from Round 1 Interviews

Theme 1-1 Motivations

Theme 1-2 Lean Six Sigma Learnings and Outcomes

I Learned How to Approach Solutions Slowly and Carefully
Don’t Jump to Solutions
Be Patient and Calm
Collect the Data
Identify the Problem by Listening to Others
Lean Six Sigma Gave Me a Voice
Evaluation of the Lean Six Sigma Tools

Theme 1-3 Lean Six Sigma in the Nonprofit Context

Lean Six Sigma is an Odd Fit, but I Got Value
The Nonprofit Environment is Uncertain

Theme 1-4 The Role of Leadership in Lean Six Sigma

Lean Six Sigma Takes a Tremendous Amount of Buy-In and Collaboration and Sustainability
It is Important for Leaders to Understand the LSS Methodology in Order to Keep it Going
Leaders Set the Tone

Results from Round 2 Interviews
Theme 2-1  People are the Challenge to Implementation 101
Theme 2-2  Growth: This Work is Important to the Sector and Mission 102
Theme 2-3  The Concepts Versus the Tools 103
Theme 2-4  Data: Becoming Data Driven 107
Being Data Driven Requires Buy-In, Especially From Leadership 107
Balancing Being Data Driven and Mission Driven 108
Emergent Themes From the Focus Groups 109
Theme 3-1 The Lean Six Sigma Tools are Useful When They are Applicable 110
Theme 3-2 Sharing Lean Six Sigma with Others Increases Buy-In 111
Theme 3-3 Lean Leads to Profits Which are Important to Nonprofit Leaders 113
Theme 3-4 Nonprofit Leaders Want Lean Six Sigma to be Sustainable in the Organization 115
Final Findings 116
Theme 4-1 Learning and Outcomes 117
Root Cause Analysis Tool is Useful 117
I Use the Tools When Applicable 117
I Use the Lean Six Concepts 121
4-2 Profits are Important 124
4-3 Critical Success Factors 126
Leadership Support is Vital 126
Widespread Knowledge is Vital 127
Conclusions 129
CHAPTER FIVE 130
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Key Responses from Workshop Participants

Root Cause Analysis is Useful for Nonprofit Leaders

The Perceived Lack of Fit is Not with Lean Six Sigma, It is with the Tools

Nonprofit Leaders Identify More with Lean and Less with Six Sigma

Nonprofit Leaders Accept that Lean Six Sigma Can Help Them be Sustainable

Changed Attitudes and Behaviors of Nonprofit Leaders

Don't Jump to Solutions and Be Patient and Calm

Identify the Problem by Listening to Others

Lean Six Sigma Gave Me a Voice

The Outcome is the Change in Attitudes and Behaviors

Implications to the Field of Nonprofit Studies

Recommendations to Practitioners

The Nonprofit Context

Use Nonprofit Examples, Master How to Identify a Process, Choose a Fitting Project

Project Selection

Leadership Recommendations

Implications for Future Research

Workshop Recommendations

Personal Reflection

REFERENCES
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Alumni Population
Table 2. Final Participant Sample
Table 3. Table of Interviews Conducted
Table 4. 501(c)(3) Organizations Represented in this Study
Table 5. Nonprofit Leader Profiles
Table 6. Emergent Themes from First Round Interviews
Table 7. Evaluation of the Lean Six Sigma Tools by Nonprofit Leaders After Earning a Green Belt
Table 8. Emergent Themes After Second Round of Interviews
Table 9. Emergent Themes from Focus Groups
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Businesslike Terms Adapted from Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner (2016)

Figure 2. DMAIC/DMADV Models

Figure 3. Data Collection

Figure 4. Nonprofit Budgets in San Diego County

Figure 5. Nonprofit Budgets in the US
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This chapter serves as an introduction and background to the larger phenomenon of sector-bending in nonprofits. It explains the current context of sector-bending in nonprofits in the U.S. It also serves to describe the concept of this study which examined sector-bending as it relates to the adoption of businesslike practices concerned with growth, efficiencies, quality, cost reduction, and operational excellence, specifically, Lean Six Sigma (LSS). LSS was the chosen business practice because it was uniquely developed in the manufacturing industry as a way to produce retail products cheaper, faster, and better - concepts that seem to conflict with the mission driven values of nonprofits. As nonprofits are choosing to implement businesslike strategies such as LSS in their organizations, what are unknown are the experiences of the nonprofit leaders as they lead the charge to adopt and deploy LSS in their nonprofit organization. Therefore, this study will examine the firsthand experiences of nonprofit leaders as they engage in sector-bending after being trained and certified in Lean Six Sigma.

Background: Sector-Bending and Blurring

Government, business, and nonprofit represent three distinct types of organizations governed by different legal frameworks designed to facilitate collective action (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990). The emergence of hybrid forms and increasing isomorphic pressures – particularly in the nonprofit sector (Bromley & Meyer, 2017; McCambridge, 2014) have challenged the traditional separation of organizational forms. Since the early 1990s, there has been a surge in external pressure for nonprofits to demonstrate accountability, specifically, in terms of what they have done with the resources they have been entrusted (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Bodem-Schrötgens &
This growing demand has prompted some nonprofits to seek ways to operate differently to demonstrate greater social impact and achieve their missions in more sustained and efficient ways. Some nonprofits are adopting new businesslike strategies into their daily operations, problem solving, and decision making such as Lean Six Sigma, Total Quality Management, Balanced Scorecard, Just in Time, Quality Assurance, Marketing Orientation, and Continuous Improvement. Many of these practices have traditionally been deployed in the private business, manufacturing, and for-profit sectors. This has become so widespread that it is a phenomenon informally referred to as sector-bending (Dees & Anderson, 2003). Generally speaking, sector-bending is “a wide variety of approaches, activities, and relationships that are blurring the distinctions between nonprofit and for-profit organizations, either because they are behaving more similarly, operating in the same realms, or both” (p.16).

Sector-bending is popularly used and broadly refers to activities or structures in which nonprofits engage that typically are found in for-profit businesses and organizations. Whether formal or informal, intentional or accidental, it can refer to the blurring of the two sectors in terms of operations, behaviors, values, or organizational structure (e.g. organizing as a social enterprise, commercialization, marketization, corporatization). The term “sector-bending” can be referred to and defined in many ways since there is not one set of definitions that the research community uses with the same semantic rigor (Maier, Meyer, & Steinbrereithner, 2016), but the general definition concerns nonprofits acting or behaving like for-profits. While encouragement to engage in sector-bending may stem from various sources, it also assumes that borrowing these businesslike strategies is effective for nonprofit organizations.
Examples of Sector-bending Found in the Field Today

This current wave of sector-bending assumes that adoption of businesslike activities or structures will position nonprofits to improve mission achievement and create greater social impact. Taking up sector-bending activities that blur the sectoral lines between nonprofit and for-profit sectors is happening in the field today. There are various activities taking place that are bringing attention to the phenomenon of sector-bending. To name a few:

- Nonprofits are utilizing resources to integrate for-profit strategies into their organizations in hopes for leaner efficiencies and increased capacity (see Appendix A San Diego Business Journal article “Business system gives nonprofits a guide to making progress on the processes”)
- Private brands are spending resources to market themselves as having nonprofit expertise in hopes to engage the business of nonprofits (see Using Lean Six Sigma at Nonprofit Organizations (villanovau.com) and E091: Process Improvement in Not-for-Profit Sectors with Tracy O’Rourke – Earth Consultants (leansixsigmavenvironment.org); Lean Six Sigma for Good – Using your improvement skills for social good. Humanitarian engineering, social services engineering, skills-based volunteering, sustainable engineering)
- Implied promises of increased social impact, cost savings, and organizational performance are found in both the academic literature as well as in practitioner collaterals (Chad, 2014; Curtis & Samy, 2014; Hersberger-Langloh, 2020; Shoham et al., 2006; Hersberger-Langloh, Stuhlinger & Schnurbein, 2020 and Applying Lean Six Sigma to Local Nonprofit Organizations - American Society for Quality (asq.org))
• Large corporations are practicing social responsibility by offering complimentary mentoring on new business strategies for small nonprofits ([Home | San Diego Social Venture Partners (sdsvp.org)]).

• Nonprofit organizations are choosing to operate as hybrid forms such as LLC’s, social enterprises, or certifying as B Corporations ([2019’s Top 5 Most Innovative And Impactful Social Enterprises (forbes.com)] and [The Mission | Newman’s Own (newmansown.com)] and [Impact Overview | TOMS] and [Establish Marine Protected Areas - Patagonia]).

• Funders and stakeholders are incentivizing nonprofits to adopt businesslike practices ([State Funded Training Grants : Lean Six Sigma — Quantum Leap Engineering]).

This list is not exhaustive, but an example of the sector-bending mindset that is targeting nonprofit organizations and practitioners in practice today.

**Pressure Towards Sector-Bending**

There are many sources that motivate a nonprofit leader to take on sector-bending activities. Perhaps the most common can be explained using institutional theory’s three types of isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Isomorphic institutionalization, specifically regarding managerial practices, is when organizations adopt similar practices as other organizations in their field over time making them look and behave similarly. DiMaggio & Powell (1983) identified three types of institutional isomorphism as coercive, memetic, and normative. Coercive isomorphism is a response to policy and regulation and the need for legitimacy. Frumpkin & Galaskiewicz (2004) explain coercive isomorphism, “when organizations are subjected to outside coercive scrutiny, evaluation, and regulation, they tend to react defensively and gravitate toward
isomorphic transformation” (p. 285). Mimetic isomorphism is a response to uncertainty (Hersberger-Langloh et al., 2020, p. 462). For example, "organizations tend to model themselves after organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152). Copying how other organizations achieved success may lead to looking similar to that organization. Normative isomorphism is a response to other professions, e.g. professionalization or belonging to an association of peer organizations which lead to the formation of the mean of similar organizations (Frumpkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004, p. 303). As professionals gather to share things such as best practices that are taken back to the nonprofit will also lead to isomorphism. Using the lens of institutional theory helps to explain the isomorphic pressures that nonprofit leaders may experience as a source of pressure to adopt similar and successful managerial practices.

When nonprofits experience market competition, it is called “marketization,” explained as when nonprofits adopt “the approaches and values of the private market (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004, p. 132) or “the penetration of essentially market-type relationships into the social welfare arena (Salamon, 1993, p. 17 as cited in Robichau & Wang, 2018, p. 147). There is a debate surrounding the widespread adoption of marketization in the nonprofit sector. One side of the debate holds that marketization is the preferred way for nonprofit organizations to be competitive and serve the public in the greatest capacity possible. The other side of the debate warns that nonprofits should not operate in a market economy in fear of losing its intrinsic and unique values (Sanders, 2012). Sandberg & Robinchau (2022) explain that the dueling pressures nonprofit leaders face of holding both prosocial and neoliberal market values calls for a “hybridized conception and experience of meaningful work” (p. 628). This hybridized
conception explains the spread of sector-bending by nonprofit leaders as they respond to the marketization of the nonprofit sector.

Authors Bromley and Meyer (2017) offer “cultural shifts” as an explanation for sector-bending other than a response to market competition. Cultural shifts are described as “the pursuit of multiple purposes that come from cultural principles endowing human actors” that take place over generations (Bromley & Meyer, 2017, p. 955). Cultural shifts explain the continual formal organization process that nonprofits experience as the world becomes increasingly scientific and focused on individualism. For example, over time, charity has evolved from a religious obligation to an opportunity to help solve social problems using a systematic and strategic method in which it will be accomplished (Bromley & Meyer, 2017). This means, as society becomes more sophisticated, so do the nonprofits. Today’s nonprofits are behaving differently than they have in the past and this can be explained as a reflection of the shifts in U.S. culture and society over the years. Therefore, motivations behind sector-bending can also be explained by the idea of cultural shifts and nonprofit leaders, being the products of the new culture, are naturally leading with a different approach.

Lastly, to understand the response by nonprofits to institutional pressures, it is necessary to discuss the meta-theory of institutional logics. Institutional logic is one of the most fitting of meta-theories which emerged as part of institutional theory (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). It offers perspective on various aspects of organizational behavior. It is defined as a “set of material practices and symbolic constructions used by organizations as guidelines for behavior” (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248 as cited in Albrecht, 2018). Institutional logics explain the rationale for decision making practices as a “vocabulary of motives” and “a sense of self that is tied to the character of an organization” (Albrecht, 2018, p. 286; Friedland & Alford, 1991). Institutional logics are the cultural and cognitive
structures by which the organization is shaped (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Institutional logic can be used to explain the source of tension nonprofit leaders may experience when engaging in sector-bending as they toggle with balancing mission and market.

**Understanding the Nonprofit Context**

To recognize the significance of sector-bending, it is important to understand the background and context of the current US nonprofit sector. The roots of modern American nonprofit and voluntary organization came from a collection of ideals strongly influenced by ancient Jewish, Roman, Greek and Christian traditions. These ancient people believed and practiced charity as a matter of social responsibility, policy, and as a way to compensate for the disparities in wealth and power. Among these were the practices of tithing, debt forgiveness, annual liturgies, and the construction of the first family foundations (Hall, 2006; Robbins, 2006). This same concept of charity extended to the US, eventually calling for more organization and government intervention to fulfill unmet public good. In post-World War II and the New Deal, government landed on a more laissez-faire structure with a broader definition of public benefit. In sum, modern day nonprofits still maintain roots in charity and caring for others but are formally recognized in the US as a tax status.

U.S. nonprofits are organizations that do not exist for the purpose of generating profits, but to provide benefits to the public. Nonprofits are designated as 501 tax-exempt entities falling into general categories such as charitable, private foundations, religious, and political organizations (retrieved from [32 Types Of Nonprofits: The Complete List – Forbes Advisor](https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesadvisor/2022/08/25/32-types-of-nonprofits-complete-list/?sh=64959f0103a4). The most common type of nonprofit organization is the 501(c)(3) which are exempt from federal income taxes and are permitted to receive tax-deductible contributions from individuals and corporations (Boris & Steuerle, 2006; retrieved from [www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/exempt-organization-types](https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/exempt-organization-types)).
logic behind such a framework is that incentivizing charitable behaviors and providing economic benefits would foster an environment to serve public purposes.

The nonprofit sector has grown in the number of registered organizations alongside charitable giving year over year in the US. In 2021, the National Center for Charitable Statistics reported over 1.8 million registered nonprofits in the US (retrieved from How many nonprofit organizations are there in the U.S.? | Knowledge base | Candid Learning; Faulk et al., 2021). In 2022, charitable giving from individuals, bequests, corporations, foundations amounted to over $499 billion (Giving USA, 2023). Also in 2021, the nonprofit sector reported expenditures exceeding $1.94 trillion (Faulk et al., 2021). These nonprofits are vibrant and diverse and the differences between them are infinite. Despite the gamut of differences, all nonprofits are driven by mission (Bush, 1992; Hall, 2006; Robbins, 2006; Sanders, 2012). Authors Salamon, Hems & Chinnock (2000) and Anheier (2014) succinctly describe nonprofits as sharing the following special structural features that shape their behaviors:

Self-Governing Organizations

Nonprofits are self-governing entities as there is a separation of ownership and control (Hansmann, 1980). Nonprofits are not owned by an individual or group, but led by a board of directors or trustees who ensure financial integrity and mission alignment (Herman & Renz, 2004). Having various stakeholders sometimes results in a lack of accountability because they serve multiple masters (Powell, 2020). However, self-governance has beneficial features in that it promotes focus on mission and human/public services and responsiveness to society’s needs, (Boris & Steuerle, 2006; Eisenberg, 1997; Powell, 2020; Watson, Wilson & Macdonald, 2020).
Nonprofits are Not Profit-Distributing

Nonprofits do not distribute profits to stakeholders, instead, profits are reinvested into the organization (Salamon, Hems & Chinnock, 2000). This makes nonprofits beholden to the non-distribution constraint which theorizes that trustworthiness increases because donors are assured that profits will not be distributed and will not be wasted on unnecessary services (Valentinov, 2008). In the same manner, nonprofits are characterized by not being concerned with profits but with providing societal needs and charity and little attention is paid to generating profits (O’Connell, 1982; Bush, 1992; Hall, 2006; Mitchell & Calabrese, 2019; Robbins, 2006).

Nonprofits are Private and Nongovernmental in Structure

Nonprofit organizations are classified as private entities without direct governmental control. Nonprofits maintain a separation from the government in terms of operations but may accept government funds in the form of philanthropic grants (Salamon, Hems & Chinnock, 2000). As a private entity, nonprofits can accept charitable donations from outside sources. Grant funding and charitable donations allow nonprofit leaders the freedom to focus on mission achievement and program delivery instead of being preoccupied with revenue generation.

Nonprofits are Voluntary

Nonprofits are voluntary organizations in which they do not coerce participation (Salamon, Hems & Chinnock, 2000; O’Connell, 1986; Powell 2020). Nonprofits are supported by an American culture that is rich in giving and volunteering which is the source of social ideas such as public libraries, child welfare, and emergency services to name a few (O’Connell, 1986). Much of the organizing and human capital is provided by volunteerism, allowing individuals the opportunity to serve while relieving the nonprofit
from staffing expenses. The voluntary structure of nonprofits results in collaborative behaviors (Bush, 1992; Eisenberg, 1997). Nonprofits also attract altruistic individuals who wish to engage in service (Eisenberg, 1997; O’Connell, 1982).

These are the characteristics that are perceived to conflict with for-profit businesslike practices causing tension when engaging in sector-bending. Dart (2004) describes businesslike practices as follows, “Business-like activities are generally understood to be those characterized by some blend of profit motivation, the use of managerial and organization design tools developed in for-profit business settings, and broadly framed business thinking to structure and organize activity” (p. 294). Adopting businesslike practices can manifest in different forms such as generating revenue from the sale of goods and services, selecting board members according to business acumen, using marketing techniques and communicative strategy, adopting a businesslike discourse, or using corporate management tools in daily operations (Suykens, Rynck & Verschuere, 2020). This definition of businesslike practices seems to conflict with the reputation of behaviors for which nonprofits are known.

An Example of Sector-bending: Teaching Lean Six Sigma to Nonprofit Leaders

This study was designed to use qualitative methods to examine the firsthand experiences of nonprofit leaders as they engage directly in sector-bending. While sector-bending encompasses a very broad range of activities, a specific sector-bending activity was needed and chosen for this study along with an appropriate sample. To ensure nonprofit leaders were, indeed, engaged explicitly and intentionally in sector-bending and to ensure equitable engagement, a sample was chosen from the University of San Diego’s Nonprofit Institute. This sample included nonprofit leaders who had engaged in training where they were taught and became certified in Lean Six Sigma. Lean Six
Sigma (LSS) is a methodology that was developed in the manufacturing industry to decrease process variability and increase efficiency when building products for retail. For this reason, Lean Six Sigma was a well-fitting for-profit business strategy for this study because it eliminated any doubt about whether these nonprofit leaders truly engaged in sector-bending and at what level. Choosing LSS, a businesslike practice from the for-profit sector, and this sample of nonprofit leaders ensured that the experiences of nonprofit leaders in sector-bending were real and robust.

Lean Six Sigma was chosen to ensure that nonprofit leaders engaged directly in sector-bending, but LSS was also a valid businesslike strategy due to its evidence-based connection to effective leadership. Lean Six Sigma has been found to be highly dependent on leadership for successful organizational deployment in for-profit companies (Laureani, 2018; Hahn, Hill, Hoerl & Zinkgraf, 1999; Achanga, Shehab, Roy & Nelder, 2006; Pande, 2007; Pamfilie, Petcu & Draghici, 2012; Laureani & Antony, 2012). Lean Six Sigma as a leadership approach is also vital to sustainability (Laureani, 2018; Pande, 2007). Much of the literature focuses on leadership as being a major factor of successful LSS deployment, which was a key component of this study.

Lean and Six Sigma are two separate methodologies that when combined, complement each other in a way that improves processes, customer satisfaction, and profits (Laureani, 2018). Together, Lean and Six Sigma attempt “to provide empowerment even at the higher-level process analysis stages, so that employees have true ownership of the process” (Pamfilie, Petcu & Draghici, 2012, p. 188). While Lean focuses on maximizing value and efficiency, Six Sigma focuses on decreasing variability (Groban, 2016). In fact, Six Sigma is the statistical representation that is as close to perfection as possible, that is, 3.4 defects per every one million times the process is performed. In the field today, Lean Six Sigma is recognized as a business model that is
“a symbol of excellence” because it is responsible for transformational success in Fortune 500 companies (Pamfilie, Petcu & Draghici, 2012, p. 187; Oke, 2007). Lean Six Sigma uses a problem-solving framework known as DMAIC which stands for define, measure, analyze, improve, and control. Each phase of the DMAIC utilizes a set of tools that are meant to be completed with a high level of collaboration among stakeholders in the organization, thus creating synergy and teamwork. With its widespread appeal, Lean Six Sigma is starting to take up a presence in the nonprofit sector as a way to increase organizational performance and social impact (Cheng & Chang, 2012; DeLeon, 2016; Fiddick, 2005).

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine what is really happening on the frontlines concerning the individual experiences of nonprofit leaders as they engage in sector-bending activities. Amidst the ongoing theoretical and scholarly debate surrounding sector-bending, what was unknown were the firsthand experiences of nonprofit leaders as they engaged explicitly in sector-bending activities. Therefore, by exploring the perceptions of nonprofit leaders in a reflective way, we better understand what is truly happening on the frontlines.

Ten nonprofit leaders were chosen from across Southern California (mostly San Diego County) who successfully completed training and received a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt conferred by the University of San Diego. The participants then returned to their nonprofits with the goal of completing the last phase of their applied project by using their newly learned skills and further integrating LSS practices into their organization’s operations and/or culture. Of the course’s alumni from the years 2019-
2023, 10 nonprofit leaders were chosen to participate in this study which took place over July 2022 - July 2023.

**Context of the Study**

In 2018, the University of San Diego launched a new workshop aimed at teaching Lean Six Sigma to nonprofits. The workshop was funded by a private individual who had recent success working with Lean Six Sigma Black Belts which resulted in improved efficiencies and increased cost savings at a regional food bank. The private donor wanted to replicate the success of implementing Lean Six Sigma with other nonprofits in San Diego County. Therefore, he personally subsidized the cost of the workshop through scholarships which kept the cost to a minimum for the participating nonprofits. The workshop was launched as a collaboration between the donor, the School of Engineering, and the School of Leadership and Education Sciences which was represented by the Nonprofit Institute. The workshop was first launched with the title, “Lead your organization to greater social impact with Lean Six Sigma.” The workshop was later changed to “Lean Six Sigma for Social Impact” in subsequent years.

The workshop was taught by a professor from the School of Engineering and Master Black Belt in Lean Six Sigma. The participating nonprofit organizations were represented by two leaders in the organization who worked on an applied project over the course of 15 weeks. The workshop required the participants to attend in-person and/or virtual classes one evening a week for 2-3 hours, learn and apply the concepts taught, and successfully complete their applied project. Upon successful completion, participants would earn a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt certification conferred from the University of San Diego.
Study Findings

This qualitative study found that the lived experiences of ten nonprofit leaders who engaged directly in sector-bending experienced a change in their perceptions, behaviors, problem solving, and approach to leadership. These leaders were mostly influenced by the foundational concepts of Lean Six Sigma which they interpreted to be the following: not jumping to solutions, being patient, the importance of collecting data, identifying the problem by listening to others, and using LSS business terminology to better communicate with stakeholders. These nonprofit leaders found the Root Cause Analysis tools to be the most useful in their practice and shared an overall consensus that LSS can have a positive impact on their organization and financial stability. Although the leaders did not report the implementation of a robust LSS program in their organization to-date, most expressed a desire to keep the methodology thriving as well as continued training. All the nonprofit leaders agreed that being data driven is important although several admitted that this is currently not a strength. Lastly, all the nonprofit leaders in this study acknowledged that profits are important to mission achievement - outweighing the theoretical tensions caused by the action of sector-bending.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter Two reviews the bodies of literature surrounding sector-bending as it relates to this study’s research questions. The literature supporting this study is separated into three sections: the debate about mission, Lean Six Sigma in nonprofits, and Lean Six Sigma leadership. Chapter 2 provides a synthesis of each section which continues to provide the background and foundation for this study. It also reveals the gap in the literature concerning sector-bending as experienced by nonprofit leaders
which this study serves to fill. The theory and bodies of literature are reviewed through the lens of this study which compare and contrast all findings.

Chapter Three describes the design of the study which used a qualitative, phenomenologically-influenced approach to retell the experiences of 10 nonprofit leaders after having received LSS certification and upon return to their organizations. Limitations and strengths of the study are also discussed.

Chapter Four reviews the thematic findings that are presented in three sections that align with the three rounds of interviews that were conducted. Following each round of interviews, the transcripts were coded and themed. The emergent themes from each round of interviews are presented individually. The purpose of presenting the findings in this manner is to demonstrate how the themes build upon each other as the interviews go deeper in depth each time.

Chapter Five concludes the study with interpretations, discussion, implications in nonprofit studies, and recommendations directed towards practice and future research.

For definitions of frequently used terms, see Appendix B.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature around nonprofit sector-bending that is relevant to the research question for this study which examines the experiences of nonprofit leaders who have engaged directly in sector-bending by adopting Lean Six Sigma into their organization. This study found that the nonprofit leaders experienced a grappling between being mission and profit driven while learning the methodology. The leaders also found the methodology to be overall helpful in their organization and the foundational principles of LSS to be helpful in their leadership practice. These concepts were found in the literature and will be addressed in the following sections.

This review consists of four sections. The first section is Sector-Bending Explained which defines the concept of sector-bending including additional names and phrases by which it is also known. This study uses the term sector-bending as defined by Dees & Anderson (2003). The framework for sector-bending which is relevant to this study is then defined by Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner (2016). This section provides the nonprofit theory and background needed to support and explain the study and its relevance.

The next section is Sector-Bending Debates. This section examines the phenomenon of sector-bending as it relates to experiences of nonprofit leaders. It reviews the literature surrounding sector-bending that takes up opposing views. There is the view that opposes sector-bending because it causes mission-drift which has detrimental repercussions to our democratic society. These authors warn nonprofit leaders against the adoption of businesslike practices as well as organizing nonprofits as commercialized businesses because it leads to distraction of the mission and values. On
the other hand, there is the view found in the literature that strongly supports sector-bending in nonprofits as it can increase organizational performance and relieves the pressures from leaders having to look for funding. Supporting authors offer advice on how best to transfer businesslike practices into nonprofits. Both sides of the debate are synthesized and provide the foundation for this study.

The third section is **Lean Six Sigma in Nonprofits.** This section begins by explaining what Lean, Six Sigma, and Lean Six Sigma are and gives practical examples to illustrate. This section then addresses the current state of adopting sector-bending practices, specifically the adoption of Lean Six Sigma in nonprofits. Much of this faction is dedicated to empirical research that demonstrates successful outcomes when Lean Six Sigma methodologies are applied to nonprofit operations. Various methods were used in the different studies to tell the success stories of LSS in nonprofits.

The fourth section is **Leadership and Lean Six Sigma** which addresses the leadership lens this study uses and synthesizes the literature around leadership and Lean Six Sigma. This sect of literature focuses on leadership as a key element of successful deployment of LSS as well as a tool for character development. The experiences of the nonprofit leaders in this study overwhelmingly confirm that leadership is vital to the sustainability of LSS in their nonprofits and testified to changes in their own behaviors and perceptions.

**Sector-Bending Explained**

There is considerable literature on the phenomenon of sector-bending across nonprofits and for-profits. While sector-bending can refer to a wide array of theoretical ideas, legal structures, or explicit practices, for purposes of this study, sector-bending as described by Dees & Anderson (2003) will be used as a guiding definition. The authors
describe sector-bending as “a wide variety of approaches, activities, and relationships that are blurring the distinctions between nonprofit and for-profit organizations, either because they are behaving more similarly, operating in the same realms, or both” (p.16). Sector-bending occurs when nonprofits adopt for-profit practices to the point where it becomes difficult to differentiate where one begins and the other ends.

Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner (2016) offer a thorough systematic review of the literature that clarifies the many delineations of sector-bending. The authors refer to sector-bending as “NPOs becoming business-like” as pictured in the organizational chart labeled Figure 1. According to their review, “business-like” is the overarching category and terms such as hybrid, social enterprise, rationalization, commercialization, marketization, corporatization, and professionalization are grouped as separate and more specific subcategories according to how nonprofits are organized. Maier, Meyer, & Steinbreithner’s (2016) review provides a distinct separation of the various types of sector-bending.

Using Maier, Meyer, & Steinbreithner’s (2016) framework, this research study focused on nonprofit managerialization because it involved the operationalization of businesslike strategies in nonprofits. In this study, the businesslike strategy is Lean Six Sigma and its operationalization within the nonprofit setting. In place of using the term managerialization to refer to the adoption of businesslike practices, I will use the term “sector-bending” as it has been popularized by Dees & Anderson (2013).
Figure 1

*Businesslike Terms Adapted from Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner (2016)*

*Note.* This chart is taken from Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner (2016) as a representation of the many definitions of becoming business-like, or sector-bending.

The simple fact is that sector-bending is, indeed, taking place in the field today. While there is abundant literature on sector-bending, the purpose of this study was to provide additional context from the perspective of nonprofit leaders on the phenomenon of sector-bending that is lacking in both literature and practice. That is, this study examined the firsthand experiences of nonprofit leaders as they undergo sector-bending, bringing to light their lived experiences in the field. By exposing what is really happening on the front lines, this study allows for a deeper understanding of sector-bending for academia as well as practice.
Sector-Bending Debates

This study found that the 10 nonprofit leaders interviewed grappled with being mission and profit driven simultaneously. This shared experience is found in the sector-bending literature. The debate about mission is a challenged concept in the literature and is a critical topic when considering the larger debate about the future of the nonprofit sector. Scholars diverge on whether engaging in sector-bending affects organizational mission with some positing that it detracts from mission achievement while others claim it enhances mission advancement. There are two major positions that scholars seem to take: against sector-bending or supportive of sector-bending.

The Debate About Mission: ‘Anti’ Sector-Bending

There is a debate in the literature surrounding the appropriateness of sector-bending because it detracts from the mission-driven nature of nonprofits. Opposition to sector-bending spans from 1990’s to the present day. Opponents to sector-bending, Bush (1992), Eisenberg (1997), Weisbrod (1986), and Sanders (2012), posit that sector-bending detracts nonprofits from their missions. Since being mission driven is the single most unifying and unique trait that all nonprofits are characterized by, albeit formally designated by, it should be the driving force that leads nonprofits by way of values and evaluation (Bush, 1992). As described in Chapter 1, nonprofit organizations uphold the ideals of democracy, collaboration, and fairness that are vital to our civil society. Yet it is argued that these values are undone as nonprofits begin to turn away from being mission-driven and start becoming market-driven (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Weisbrod, 1997; Jones, 2007). Brainyard & Siplon (2004) posit when nonprofits engage in businesslike practices, “the soul of the nonprofit sector seems to be up for grabs” (pg. 436). These authors take an explicit position against nonprofits becoming businesslike
and discourage engaging in sector-bending ventures on the grounds that it causes mission-drift which endangers our democratic society.

Criticism of sector-bending further argues that it fragments the spirit of collaboration, teamwork, faith, and the voluntary essence inherent in the American character (Bush, 1992; Eisenberg, 1997; Sanders, 2012). Responding to market conditions instead of mission, promotes a sense of competition within the nonprofit sector which diminishes collaboration between organizations in fear of losing market share to trade secrets. This is in direct opposition to the traditions and core values of altruism, compassion, and volunteerism upon which the nonprofit sector was built. Authors charge:

“Leadership in the sector must engage this issue and clearly delineate the appropriate degree to which the sector can and should borrow from private sector theory, methods, and techniques. Parameters need to be set that allow the sector to borrow, adapt, and use techniques without destroying the essential character and traditions of the sector that have contributed to its public support” (Bush, 1992, p.393).

“We have to renew the spirit of public service, commitment, and integrity that historically has characterized our sector” (Eisenberg, 1997, p.341).

“It is argued that the increasing pressure to contain costs and to generate revenue in competition with private enterprises could compromise nonprofits’ ability to pursue social missions” (Weisbrod, 1998 as cited by Jönsson, 2019, p.1).
These anti-sector-bending authors argue that engaging in sector-bending activities invokes a “deep resistance” (Bush, 1992), or an “organizing tension” in nonprofits as they must negotiate their place in a market economy while acting and operating as a charity. Sanders (2012) explains, “As nonprofit organizations operate within a market economy, values such as commitment beyond self, individual worth and dignity, responsibility, tolerance, freedom, and responsibilities of citizens that underlie nonprofit work can be overshadowed by economic and competition-centered values that seek to secure competitive advantage in the pursuit of producing individual-level goods and services” (p.180). Bush (1992) claims that borrowing from the for-profit sector places demands on nonprofits that are in opposition to caring for multifaceted human beings. For example, meeting efficiency goals while working with autistic children can present a conflict for practitioners and the organization. This is an example of the mission-market tension that nonprofits are challenged with daily.

The introduction of businesslike practices into nonprofit organizations conjures a new challenge often referred to as balancing the double bottom line, that of “maintaining an unprofitable social mission alongside the constant and often stringent imperatives of operating within a market economy” (Sanders, 2015, p. 205). Sanders (2015) calls it “mission-market tension” (p. 205) where the problem of pursuing a social mission while paying attention to market demands must be considered (Sanders, 2015; Sanders & McClellan, 2014). Stull (2009) refers to the tension as a wrestling between social entrepreneurial management and traditional management approaches. Brainard & Siplon (2004) label the tension as keeping a nonprofit spirit viable in a for-profit world. Lastly, King (2017) refers to them as polar opposites as “technologies of performance” versus “technologies of agency” (p. 241). The mission-market tension seemed to be the challenge most discussed by some of this study’s participants. Some of the nonprofit
leaders mentioned how the desire to increase profits came into conflict with implementing LSS in their organization, particularly when using profit-focused tools.

This “deep resistance” or “organizing tension” is described in the literature as being experienced at two levels: organizational and individual and will be described separately in the following sections. There is the tension that nonprofits experience that is brought on by adopting a hybrid form when organizing. Similarly, individuals experience a form of tension as nonprofit leaders with the toggling between mission and market.

**Organizational Tension**

Cooney (2006) refers to the organizational level as “multiple sector membership” (p. 145) and provides empirical evidence that hybrid nonprofits experience internal organizational tensions as they must struggle to balance client services with commercial pressures. Cooney (2006) posits that hybrids are positioned in two different organizational fields and require different internal technologies. Cooney calls for continued research to inform practitioners on how best to resolve the organizational tension. However, Sanders (2015) argues there is no resolution to the tension -- that it is an inherent and essential feature of nonprofit organizing.

**Individual Tension**

Perhaps the most in depth contributions to the body of literature on individual tensions are found in Stull (2009) and King (2017). Both studies used a case study approach that best capture the intimate details of tension felt by nonprofit leaders. Stull (2009) examined the lived experience of a nonprofit CEO as he toggled between “mission and market” by using observation and several in-depth interviews over a six-
week period. Stull (2009) states that the purpose of his research was not for purposes of generalizability, but rather to share the thick description of one leader’s ‘deep resistance’ experience. King (2017) used autoethnography, a careful reflective process, to document the back and forth shifting he experienced as a nonprofit leader by recounting stories in vignettes. Both authors produced similar findings in that the tension was best conceptualized as two ends of a continuum. Brainard & Siplon (2004) concurred and clarified that the extremes are not independent of one another but are part of a continuum where nonprofit leaders shift back and forth to varying degrees. Authors agree that the extremes are not mutually exclusive, but that you can, indeed, be both mission and market simultaneously.

Sanders & McClellan (2014) claim that “scholars have not explored the ways in which nonprofit practitioners communicatively reconcile the inherent tensions between being business-like and the pursuit of a social mission” (p. 68). So, in conducting their own empirical study of nonprofit leaders, they focused their findings largely in the use of language and communication. Sanders & McClellan (2014) found that language, particularly the way nonprofit leaders were “sophisticated & flexible” (p. 78) in their use of it, as the primary way they reconciled balancing businesslike work with a social mission. The article’s use of many quotations by the study’s subjects demonstrated a clear toggling between being businesslike and mission-driven is found to corroborate the findings of Stull (2009), King (2017) and Brainard & Silon (2004). This is very similar to the toggling that the nonprofit leaders of this study felt as they learned the LSS methodology. They described feeling a tension between wanting to implement LSS, but were cautious of doing so if the tradeoff felt unbalanced. Most of these nonprofit leaders also recounted how LSS training offered them a new vernacular that helped to communicate businesslike concepts with stakeholders.
It is worth recognizing one ethnographic study in particular by Jensen (2018) that provides support for the anti-sector-bending literature. This study examined how the social impact of a small halfway home in the US was not affected by the refusal to adopt businesslike practices. Aptly titled, “People can't believe we exist!”, this study’s isolated findings demonstrated how a charity resisted the pressures of the “dominant rationalities for nonprofit sustainability” to adopt businesslike practices (p. 387). Social impact was improved because the organization was able to provide higher quality of service rather than a higher quantity of services and was not pressured to become businesslike because it also refused to file as a 501(c)(3). In Jensen’s (2018) search to find evidence that social impact can be increased without the use of businesslike practice, the author found a subject that was exceptionally appropriate in supporting the anti-sector-bending rationale as well add support to Bush’s (1992) argument that nonprofits should stay close to their mission.

The Debate About Mission: ‘Pro’ Sector-Bending

Conversely, there are scholars who offer that sector-bending, or adopting businesslike strategies in nonprofits, is a positive way to grow the capacities of nonprofits. These authors posit that the adoption of businesslike strategies lead to improved organizational performance and less reliance and the distraction of philanthropy and fundraising. A faction of these authors also offer advice on appropriately adopting sector-bending practices.

The following is opposing evidence using empirical research to refute the claim that businesslike practices cause mission-drift that are detrimental to services delivered by the organization. These empirical studies directly dispute this claim by presenting findings that businesslike practices are positively related to organizational performance
(Chad, 2014; Curtis & Samy, 2014; Hersberger-Langloh, 2020; Shoham et al., 2006; Hersberger-Langloh, Stuhlinger & Schnurbein, 2020;) and decrease the likelihood of mission-drift (Hersberger-Langloh et al., 2020; Shoham et al., 2014). For example, three empirical studies by Chad (2014), Herberger-Langloh (2020), and Shoham et al. (2006) found that adopting the businesslike strategy called “market orientation,” is positively related to organizational performance. Shoham et al. (2006) found that the relationship is even stronger in nonprofits than for-profits. Together, the combination of these three studies makes a strong case because they represent a trio of methods -- a metanalysis, a qualitative study, and a quantitative study that all put forth similar findings. However, their studies were limited to the businesslike practice of market orientation when there are dozens of other businesslike practices that exist and are being used in the field today (two of the studies took place outside the US). Additionally, market orientation is an internal measurement of organizational performance. It is not an external measurement of social impact. To summarize, the quantitative study by Suykens, Maier, Meyer & Verschuere (2023) found that businesslike practices are positively related to nonprofit societal roles, “Our results suggest that a certain optimism regarding the rational use of businesslike approaches is justified” (p. 682).

Those who support sector-bending, posit that it has its advantages by increasing capacity, accountability, and efficiency in nonprofits (Dees & Anderson, 2003). For example, by offering a fee-for-service model, many nonprofits have ventured into new territories that have offered a steady source of income and less reliance on grants and philanthropy (Dees & Anderson, 2003). This has not led to market-mission tensions as predicted by critics, instead, it has eliminated or decreased the fundraising demands that nonprofit executives juggle as they lead their organization. Such fee-for-service business strategies have long been used by for-profit businesses and since they pay attention to
customer satisfaction, they tend to implement change faster and increase accountability (Mitchel & Calabrese, 2019). Nonprofits who utilize fee-for-service will reap the benefits of faster change and increased accountability since they must be especially responsive to customers who provide direct feedback and have the power to complain publicly (Dees & Anderson, 2003). In fact, most of the participants in this study seemed to confirm this part of the literature in that they believed LSS has an overall positive benefit to the organization. Most participants believed that LSS can make them more profitable, which is positively correlated with service delivery.

Another recommendation to scholars and practitioners found emergent in the literature is the plausibility of whether businesslike practices can transfer across sectors at all. Previously in this review, many articles demonstrated increases in organizational performance as a result of adopting businesslike practices. However, there is a faction who sternly caution on how the transfer of businesslike practices is operationalized. Specifically, authors warn, “It is simply false to think that formal tools intended to improve nonprofits are straightforwardly transferred from the business world” (Bromley & Meyer, 2017, p. 946) because nonprofits cannot replicate the characteristics of business firms (Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000). In fact, two empirical studies authenticated this claim by offering evidence that suggests transferability is dependent upon surrounding factors and organizational infrastructure and should not be attempted in isolation (Beck, Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2008; Williams, 2010). Although the authors do not oppose sector-bending activities, their message is to take cautionary measures when doing so. The literature suggests that businesslike strategies should be modified and reshaped to fit the unique needs of a nonprofit organization. This section of the literature confirms the findings from this study in that some nonprofit leaders experienced difficulty in applying the LSS tools because the tools did not seem applicable to their project. This
was then generalized by some workshop students to mean the entire LSS methodology was not applicable to nonprofits. However, the principles on which LSS is founded (e.g. involving others) is a learning that most of the participants expressed as a positive outcome. These participants did not express high levels of using the tools taught, but they did express a positive change in behavior after training. This is an adaptation that was made by the participants when the LSS teachings were not found to be relevant.

Authors offer another set of advice to nonprofit leaders engaging in sector-bending. These authors suggest using businesslike tools that are not solely aimed at efficiency and effectiveness. This position argues that increasing efficiency is not a component for success. Instead, nonprofits should look to values, building of a strong culture, and especially strategy for competitive advantage (Curtis & Samy, 2014; Beck, Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2008; Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000). In fact, strategy and long-term strategy planning were found to position nonprofits for successful utilization of businesslike strategies (Litalien, 2012; Mikolajczak, 2019; Stull, 2009).

Other Considerations: Policy and Regulation

There is yet another consideration of whether this phenomenon of sector-bending is properly supported by the current three-sector form of governance. Scholars dispute whether the rise of the sector-bending phenomenon demands a new or amended regulatory status, even perhaps, a status that is concerned with more than just tax benefits. They grapple with questions of whether a separate sector is necessary to encourage self-regulation or to increase governmental regulation to improve accountability and oversight (Anheier & Toepler, 2019; Eisenberg, 1997; Bromley & Meyer, 2017).
This study moves past the ongoing theoretical and scholarly debate surrounding sector-bending because the question is not whether sector-bending is appropriate. This study acknowledges that sector-bending is happening in the field, regardless, and offers an examination into what the experiences are on the frontlines amidst the debate.

**Lean and Six Sigma in Nonprofits**

This section will describe Lean methodology and principles followed by Six Sigma methodology. It concludes with recommendations to the methodologies to keep them relevant in today’s market as well as with the crossover to nonprofits.

**Understanding Lean**

Lean Six Sigma (LSS) is a business improvement methodology that focuses on quality and efficiency to the benefit of the customer and the organization. Its aim is to “maximize shareholder value by improving quality, speed, customer satisfaction, and costs” (Laureani & Antony, 2012, p. 275). Lean Six Sigma is a highly recognized business methodology, particularly in the manufacturing and for-profit industries. However, Lean Six Sigma is becoming more widely adopted across various industries including nonprofit.

Lean and Six Sigma are two distinct methodological approaches to process improvement but are combined quite frequently because they are powerful together (https://tallyfy.com/lean-vs-six-sigma/). Lean Six Sigma “uses tools from both toolboxes, in order to get the best of the two methodologies, increasing speed while also increasing accuracy” (Laureani, 2018, p. 21). It is commonly referred to and recognized in the industry as *Lean Six Sigma* even though the two methodologies can be studied and
employed separately. Professionals can be certified as Lean, Six Sigma, or Lean Six Sigma.

Lean is focused on solving problems that are caused by waste in a process. It maintains strong roots in the manufacturing industry, particularly in aerospace. Lean utilizes templates, techniques, and individual tools to assist workers to identify and remove inefficiencies. Of these tools is an acronym called DOWNTIME that can be used to identify wastes. The letters stand for (Groban, 2016; McGee-Abe, 2015):

D – **Defects.** This involves a defective part of production, a service that does not meet customer expectations, or delivering poor quality.

O – **Overproduction.** This is when the organization is producing, even when it is not needed, producing more than the market is willing to buy, sometimes it is just-in-case.

W – **Waiting.** This involves teams having to wait for another team to finish its part in the process and work must stop.

N – **Not utilizing talent.** This happens when unnecessary meetings take place, underutilizing people’s talents, and any other failure to maximize human capital.

T – **Transportation.** A poorly designed layout can cause extra physical work which adds time delays.

I – **Inventory.** Too much inventory can tie up funds and too little inventory can lead to delays.

M – **Motion.** This involves the placement of people and materials in efficient proximity to reduce the time it takes to complete a process.
**E – Extra processing.** This refers to the extra processes that do not add value or time savings that can be eliminated without affecting the final product.

There are five principles of Lean Thinking that were put forth by authors Womack and Jones (1996) that maximize efficiency. The five principles are (Weigel, 2000):

**Value.** Value is described as the primary tenet of Lean being able to provide the value that customers want.

**Value Stream.** The value stream is the description of all the steps in the process from start to finish.

**Flow.** Flow follows the path of production of the value stream, making sure it is free of bottlenecks and stoppages.

**Pull.** Pull refers to the delivery of instructions where nothing is produced until the customer signals the need.

**Perfection.** Perfection refers to the commitment to the continuous improvement of the value stream by eliminating waste and increasing value.

**Understanding Six Sigma**

The second half of Lean Six Sigma is Six Sigma. Six Sigma (SS) gets its name from being the statistical representation of what is as close to perfection as possible, that is, the standard deviation of a process that yields 3.4 defects (or errors) per every million opportunities or 99.99966% accuracy.

Six Sigma has an extensive background in Japanese philosophy that has been translated to Western culture. The first American adoption and introduction of Six Sigma
began at Motorola in the mid-1980’s by engineer Bill Smith when it was threatened by Japanese competition. Motorola began utilizing Six Sigma to minimize defects, increase quality, and escalate customer value while reporting exceptional outcomes (Oke, 2007). Soon, other powerhouse organizations such as IBM, Sony, Lockheed Martin, DuPont, and Starwood Hotels began recording success due to Six Sigma adoption (Oke, 2007). Today, Six Sigma is a highly recognized methodology for quality management across all types of industries and different sized organizations. Oke (2007) states, “Six Sigma is a well-structured problem solving and continuous improvement methodology applied in a variety of world-class companies.” Now, recognized as an industry standard, Six Sigma has become a phenomenon with widespread appeal because of its proven effectiveness and results (Oke, 2007; Swink & Jacobs, 2012).

Six Sigma has demonstrated exceptional organizational effectiveness in the for-profit industry. Well-known organizations have been studied – Motorola, General Electric (GE), 3M, and many others have documented and attributed their phenomenal success to the commitment to Six Sigma:

- Motorola’s winning of the Malcolm Baldrige Award in 1998 and $15 million in savings over 11 years of SS (Henderson & Evans, 2000)
- GE documented $700 million in benefits from increased productivity (as cited by Henderson & Evans, 2000)
- 3M reported a savings of about $400 million per year and its NYSE share price almost doubled between 2001 and 2004 (Canato & Ravasi, 2015)

Six Sigma is a process improvement methodology that takes a concentrated examination of an operational process and attempts to reduce the amount of defects and costs and ensures quality and increased customer value. It is a systematic and continual evaluation of critical processes (Jones, 2004). Six Sigma focuses on reducing defects or
errors while increasing customer value. It is described as a “quality management process for achieving, sustaining and maximizing business success… its customer-driven approach and focus on defect elimination has a measurable impact on a company’s bottom line” (Jones, 2004, p. 24). Additionally, Six Sigma maintains characteristics that make it unique to other management processes such as:

- SS is considered a statistical and “data driven approach to problem solving” (Swink & Jacobs, 2012, p. 438).
- SS employs a top-down hierarchical structure where the first to engage in an SS project are high level leaders and/or executives referred to as Champions.
- SS projects are facilitated by specialists known as (in order of highest to lowest designation) master black belts, black belts, green belts, and yellow belts.
- SS is championed by a staff person who is designated the Process Owner.
- Team Members are staff who support their department’s SS project.
- When Lean and Six Sigma are merged, they require a higher level of leadership for greater success and sustained results (Laureani, 2018; Pande, 2007).

The most utilized framework supporting the Lean Six Sigma methodology is referred to by the acronym DMAIC (pronounced “duh-may-ick”) which is a five-step process to problem solving. The DMAIC “is a valuable tool that helps people find permanent solutions to long-standing or tricky business problems” (George, Rowland, Price & Maxey, 2005, p. 2). DMAIC is a tool and the framework by which Lean Six Sigma uses a logical approach to solving complex and systemic problems by making small, incremental changes. The five phases are as follows:

1. **Define:** The scope of the project or problem is identified and performance targets are set and written up in a charter document.
2. **Measure**: Collect data to understand the current state and establish baselines.

3. **Analyze**: Use the data to find the root causes.

4. **Improve**: Evaluate and identify optimal solutions and implement the pilot solutions.

5. **Control**: Develop plans and documents to monitor the new process for ongoing improvement by the process owner.

In addition to the DMAIC and since it is meant for existing processes, there is the DMADV which focuses on creating new processes (Gray, 2021). DMADV stands for Define, Measure, Analyze, Design, and Verify. The definitions of define, measure, analyze are the same as above. Design refers to the development of a high level design, and Verify is validating to see if the new design is acceptable to stakeholders (retrieved from sixsigmadaily.com at [https://www.sixsigmadaily.com/what-is-dmadv/](https://www.sixsigmadaily.com/what-is-dmadv/)). A model of the DMAIC/DMADV is pictured in Figure 2.
Figure 2

DMAIC/DMADV Models

Note. The DMAIC Model and DMADV Model are shown here as a process improvement workflow.

Certifications and Professional Associations

Professionals can also become certified Lean Six Sigma practitioners since the facilitation of LSS requires education, training, and the successful completion of an applied project. There is a hierarchy in Six Sigma certification that recognizes completion of progressively complex projects with increasing financial impact. Simple projects can be led by yellow and green belt certified practitioners and more complicated and costly projects are led by black belts and master black belts. Certification in Lean, Six Sigma, and Lean Six Sigma can be authorized in various ways which include from agencies such as the American Society for Quality, International Association of Six Sigma Certification or can be conferred to employees by their organization. There is no one accrediting organization, which leaves room for ambiguity, but the certification is still
recognized and highly sought after in business, corporate, and manufacturing companies.

Six Sigma Needs to be Updated

While authors Goh and Xie (2004), Goh (2013), Jones, Parast and Adams (2010), McAdam and Lafferty (2004), and Poling (2012) agree that culture is important to the sustainability of Six Sigma, they additionally suggest that Six Sigma may need some adjustments to stay relevant. Even with the immense popularity of Six Sigma adoption, it may soon be outpaced by the fast-changing environment and global competitiveness in organizations. The myopic “project by project improvement” (Goh, 2013, p. 1392) and top-down hierarchical structure are two of Six Sigma’s potential weaknesses that may disrupt its long-term effectiveness (Jones et al., 2010). It is recommended that Six Sigma begin adopting a systems thinking approach which acknowledges both process and people (Jones et al., 2010). This means moving beyond the technical and mechanized approach of process improvement and to consider a behavior-oriented approach (McAdam & Lafferty, 2004) as a way to insure Six Sigma sustainability. While this call to action is riddled with an array of differing solutions, they all agree with the prospectus “Past Performance is no Guarantee of Future Results” (Goh, 2013, p. 1389). Sustainability may be threatened by an outdated Six Sigma methodology. This position is further supported by the literature surrounding leadership in LSS that posits leadership characteristics and behaviors as a critical success factor to the implementation of LSS. In fact, the participants in this study converge on the explicit need for leadership in order to deploy LSS. Leadership is key in terms of support, knowledge, and character were emphasized by the participants and can also be corroborated by the literature. Based on the findings in this study, it is recommended that facilitators amend the traditional teaching delivery of LSS to meet the unique needs of nonprofits. This may include using
nonprofit examples that are relevant to their projects and using flexibility when following
the DMAIC framework so that behaviors and perceptions can be discussed that
acknowledge the sector-bending tension students may be experiencing.

**Lean Six Sigma in the Nonprofit Literature**

Despite the collection of literature surrounding Lean Six Sigma as a successful
business practice, the literature focused on Lean Six Sigma in the nonprofit sector is less
abundant and robust. The recentness of the research is understandable being that Lean
Six Sigma, itself, has only been in existence for the last 35-40 years. Additionally, its
application was predominantly in the for-profit sector for the vast majority of its
existence. Consequently, with lagged application in the nonprofit sector, we can expect a
further lag in its study. This section includes an overview of the LSS literature involving
nonprofits which is predominantly linked to positive outcomes and success stories.

**Lean Six Sigma Linked to Positive Outcomes in Nonprofits**

There is a theme that emerges that links positive outcomes in nonprofits to the
use of LSS. Authors Cheng & Chang (2012), De Leon (2016), Kovach & Ingle (2019),
and Fiddick (2005), each use case studies to examine the effectiveness of LSS
implementation in individual nonprofit organizations. Each of their findings suggest a
positive correlation to the implementation of LSS in such terms as time and cost savings,
standardization of processes, and increased customer and employee satisfaction. It is
noteworthy to mention that De Leon (2016) and Cheng & Chan (2012) studied the
warehouse and production line of separate nonprofits which is similar to for-profit
manufacturing operations where LSS is arguably easier to implement. However,
Fiddick’s (2005) sample focused on church administrators, and assessed their ability to
adopt solutions garnered through the LSS methodology. This is an example of capturing
the uniqueness of a classic mission-driven nonprofit and exposing it to the businesslike practice of LSS. Similarly, Getchius (2011) studied the effectiveness of program delivery involving nonprofit ministry volunteers which is also reflective of the differences of service-oriented nonprofits.

There were ten empirical studies found dealing with LSS in nonprofits that suggested positive outcomes linked to the implementation of Lean Six Sigma in the organization (see Appendix C). All the studies supported nonprofit adoption of Lean Six Sigma into the organization as a method to enhance operations and efficiencies, cost savings, and improved performance. These empirical studies are aligned with the findings of this study which confirmed that all participants found the LSS training to be beneficial, albeit to different degrees.

These studies that examine LSS in nonprofits make practical recommendations to the field focused on how to successfully adopt and sustain Lean Six Sigma in nonprofits (Hajikordestani, 2010; Gray, 2021; Lochner, 2018, El-Amin, 2016). One of these recommendations suggest that for an organization to maximize the usefulness of LSS, they must keep things simple and focus on behaviors over tools (Gray, 2021, p. 64). One of the primary findings in this study confirms this recommendation. That is, the participants reported minimal usage of the LSS that were taught during the workshop. They did report a change in behaviors associated with the over training that reflects the foundation principles of LSS. These behaviors and improved approach to leadership seemed to have stronger sustainability than use of the tools.

The articles also serve to share best practices. Best practices, as described by Lochner (2018), “is often used to describe those tasks, activities, and patterns that an organization should take on in order to perform better, to excel” (p. 9). Best practices are meant to be transferable across organizations, suggesting a better way to perform activities or processes than status quo. Lochner (2018) recommends to “build an
awareness and a culture open to the idea of improvement before introducing major
initiatives” (p. 155) to increase the likelihood of acceptance to change. El-Amin (2016)
recommends a best practice concerning leadership which says to improve operations,
leadership needs to foster better teamwork through employee engagement (p. 122). One
of the themes of this study confirms that this is a best practice as it was repeatedly
mentioned by the participants that buy-in, and collaboration was important. They
recounted that garnering buy-in and engagement from others is key to successful
implementation and sustainability.

Lastly, one of Hajikordestani’s (2010) top recommendations is to choose the right
project because selection of the wrong project can lead to failure (p. 50). The author
suggests using three criteria in project selection: business benefit, feasibility, and
organizational impact (p. 50). Project selection was a theme with some of the
participants who were not satisfied with the project they chose for the workshop. These
participants were disappointed in the project, but not in the overall learning process.
Since this was the first LSS project performed by the participants, they can use caution
and best practice recommendations in choosing future projects to avoid system-wide
failure.

To this end, what may be problematic about these studies suggesting best
practices for Lean Six Sigma implementation is the diversity and complexity of the
organizational context of the nonprofit sector. Nonprofits vary in size, scope, and
mission, making generalizability of best practices concerning the implementation of Lean
Six Sigma, challenging. This limitation is echoed in this study as the participating
organizations were very large and not well representative of the classic nonprofit found
in the US.
Lean Six Sigma in Nonprofits Success Stories

There are an abundance of articles found in non-reviewed practitioner journals, white papers, books, and commercial periodicals that write about success stories of successful LSS projects. These articles typically boast incredible cost savings, increased margins, and quantifiable efficiencies as they are favorable to the adoption of LSS in nonprofits. The content for these articles has been written for an audience of practitioners with the goal of providing examples and recommendations for best practices, influencing adoptions, and sharing successful experiences. For example:

- Akron’s Children’s Hospital’s food bank reduced the number of days the food took to move through the bank’s process and into the hands of the underserved from 92 days to less than 40 days. Additional examples can be found at sixsigmadaily.com (retrieved from https://www.sixsigmadaily.com/six-sigma-nonprofit/, 2018)
- After implementing Six Sigma, the YMCA made changes to 40% of their day camp programs toward a goal of 75% nationwide to make sure every camper learned something new each day and made new friends. Additional examples can be found at socialworker.com (Groban, 2016, retrieved from https://www.socialworker.com/nonprofit/tonic/six-sigma/).
- Yale New Haven reduced bloodstream infections by 75% for cost savings of $1.2M due to their Lean Six Sigma efforts to optimize workflows (Mixson, 2023, retrieved from https://www.processexcellencenetwork.com/lean-six-sigma-business-performance/articles/why-lean-six-sigma-is-poised-for-a-comeback-in-2023; also retrieved from https://www.villanovau.com/resources/six-sigma/six-sigma-improving-healthcare/)
The literature surrounding Lean Six Sigma in nonprofits converge on demonstrating that LSS is linked to positive organizational outcomes and is overall beneficial to the nonprofit. This faction of the literature also converges with the “pro” sector-bending literature mentioned above that supports the adoption of LSS into nonprofits because of financial benefits to the nonprofit. Many success stories are studied and published in practitioner journals to not only show positive outcomes, but also to make practice recommendations. This study serves a similar purpose in that it, too, demonstrates LSS being linked to positive outcomes particularly in terms of stronger leadership and practice behaviors.

**Lean Six Sigma Leadership**

There is a faction of the literature that focuses on leadership surrounding the implementation and sustainability of Lean Six Sigma. This faction posits that leadership is vital to implementation and sustainability. Author Laureani and colleagues have written a substantial amount on the topic of leadership and critical success factors (CSFs) for LSS implementation, finding that leadership is key. Laureani & Antony’s (2012) survey corroborates the findings of 31 books and articles that name management commitment and organizational culture as some of the most important CSFs for the implementation of a new LSS program. Laureani & Antony (2012) conducted their study specifically for only new implementation of LSS into an organization, and not where there was an existing program. The current literature at the time of their study, they explain, was for LSS programs that were already in existence in the organizations. So, there was a difference between their study and previous studies as well a different contribution to practice. The authors did not mention the type of industry or sector. Authors built upon these findings in 2017 to find that the smaller the company, the greater the need for strong leadership for successful implementation (p. 405).
Another sect of the literature focuses on LSS as leadership development. Pande (2007) suggests that Six Sigma is a type of leadership in of itself. That is, “Six Sigma Leadership is a set of principles that can be applied to create greater success and sustained results for an organization. It’s based on the idea that outstanding leadership is an artful, but learnable, combination of skills that combine balance and flexibility to drive goals and performance” (p. 15). Just as Six Sigma is the practice of continuous improvement, so too is Six Sigma Leadership a commitment to the “constant effort to be a better leader” (p. 12). Pande acknowledges that it is important for leaders to build consensus with others because “followers” are the vehicle by which the LSS work gets done (p. 12). Pande’s writing is a textbook that offers practical tools for leaders to enhance their leadership skills to build a sustainable Six Sigma culture in their organization. Similarly, Laureani & Antony (2017) used a qualitative study to derive a list of 10 leadership characteristics that are conducive to implementation. The characteristics are “visible, communicative, inspirational, consistent, targeted, leading by example, flexible, perceive Lean Six Sigma as a philosophy, clearly define roles and responsibilities, and able to build” (Laureani & Antony, 2017a, p. 405). Authors prescribe that strengthening such characteristics may increase successful deployment of LSS into their organization. Lastly, in their longitudinal study, Laureani & Antony (2018) found that different types of leadership approaches are needed depending on the LSS program maturity in the organization. They specifically studied what is required for successful deployment and found that leadership, project management, top talent, and financial accountability were critical success factors. Once again, they were not explicit in the type of sector that was in their population.

In sum, this chapter reviewed the literature surrounding sector-bending and more specifically, the integration of Lean Six Sigma in nonprofits as a sector-bending activity. Both the literature and findings from this study confirmed a shared experience by
nonprofit leaders concerning a grappling between the desire to be mission and profit focused at the same time. The literature and study findings also confirmed that learning and implementing LSS into nonprofits was a positive experience and had positive outcomes for the nonprofit. Of course, this disconfirms the ‘anti’ sector-bending literature that posits engaging in businesslike practices is detrimental to nonprofits. The nonprofit leaders in this study did not find this to match their personal experience. Lastly, leadership as a critical success factor to the successful implementation of LSS in organizations, including nonprofits, was found to be key in both the literature and in this study. Leadership support and technical knowledge were emphasized by the study’s nonprofit leaders and the literature confirmed that leadership is important to the deployment of LSS in all organizations, including nonprofits.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology for this qualitative study that serves to provide a deeper understanding of nonprofit leader experiences with sector-bending. In this chapter, I will describe why a qualitative methodology was chosen as the best design to describe and document lived experiences of nonprofit leaders. Next, I describe how a purposeful random sample of 10 individuals were chosen and in depth, semi-structured interviews were used as the best and most logical form of data collection. Then, I describe how data analysis was conducted after each round of interviews to show the progression of clarity and depth of discussion. Next, I discuss the quality measures of my study through the use of triangulation and member checking to increase trustworthiness. Lastly, limitations such as nonprofit size, budget, type, and bias are also discussed.

Qualitative Design

I was invited to participate in the inaugural 2019 workshop because of my role as a doctoral student specializing in nonprofit and philanthropic leadership with an interest in operations, process improvement, and Lean Six Sigma. My role was to observe the workshop, and provide nonprofit expertise as needed since the instructor had mostly for-profit teaching experience. I was also asked to debrief with the instructor throughout the course to brainstorm how to tailor the class to meet the unique needs of nonprofits.

Watching some nonprofit leaders grapple and others excel while learning the Lean Six Sigma tools and concepts quickly became a focus and interest for me. One nonprofit leader used the phrase, “It takes a lot of brainpower” to describe the challenges he experienced as he attempted to apply the new business concepts he was learning.
into his nonprofit practice. This caught my attention, and I became alert to the resistance that nonprofit leaders faced while trying to comprehend and operationalize the Lean Six Sigma concepts as they were being taught.

Therefore, my goal with this study is to further the discussion about the challenges, resistance, success and overall experiences of applying LSS into their organizations through the lens of the nonprofit leader. I believe that providing this space for nonprofit leaders to openly reflect on their experiences is a way that we can truly understand the implications of becoming businesslike while also serving as a nonprofit leader. This way, we can better understand the phenomenon of sector-bending and Lean Six Sigma leadership in nonprofits.

A qualitative research approach was chosen to explore and understand the lived experiences of individuals that ascribe to a similar phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study sought to explore the experiences of nonprofit leaders who experienced the phenomenon of sector-bending after completing a Lean Six Sigma workshop, receiving a Green Belt certification, and implementing the new practices in their nonprofit organization. It was my intention to bring to light the meaning nonprofit leaders ascribed to their sector-bending experiences as frontline nonprofit leaders. This way, we can most accurately understand what is really happening in the field today. Exploring and retelling nonprofit leader experiences through thematic analysis reflects the realities of sector-bending and adds novel evidence to the academic literature. Marshall & Rossman (2016) describe qualitative research as one that “privileges” (pg. 101), or gives attention to, individuals' lived experiences. The authors write,

“For a study focusing on individuals’ lived experience, the researcher can also argue that human actions cannot be understood unless the meaning humans assign to those actions is understood. Because thoughts, feelings, beliefs,
values, and assumptions are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face-to-face interaction and observation in the natural setting” (p. 101).

This study employed a qualitative approach to best understand and reflect on the experiences of nonprofit leaders as told through their very own words and lived experiences.

Qualitative research also means that “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis” (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 5). This is confirmed as I not only conducted all the interviews and observations but developed relationships with the nonprofit leaders over the various 15-week workshops and, in most cases, beyond. In fact, my involvement in the workshops had allowed me to build relationships with the participants over the semester which increased the trustworthiness of this study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I attended the classes, including providing one-on-one technical assistance on the subject matter with the participants. Additionally, I held a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt certification previously earned as part of this same workshop in 2019 which has allowed me to build trust and empathy.

There is a phenomenological tactic used to increase researcher reflexivity where the researcher suspends judgment by “bracketing,” or putting aside the urge to analyze and interpret the phenomena to arrive at an unprejudiced conclusion (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 31). The authors suggest that the best way to achieve this is to practice active listening, sensitivity, and attentiveness to the vibe and tone emanating from the participants. Through observations and in-depth interviews, I practiced active listening and treated the participants as the true experts of their experiences.
Sampling

To address the research question, a purposeful random sample of 10 individuals were chosen from all the alumni nonprofit leaders who completed the University of San Diego’s Nonprofit Institute workshop that taught Lean Six Sigma to nonprofits, certifying participants with a Green Belt certification upon successful completion. This population consisted of all cohorts which attended from 2019 until 2022 which consisted of 7 cohorts with a total of 60 participants.

The sampling from this training group was purposeful regarding choosing nonprofit leaders who had explicitly engaged in sector bending in their organization. Using this population guaranteed that the participants engaged directly in sector-bending by way of learning and implementing Lean Six Sigma in their nonprofit organization. However, I applied the following criterion to the population: (1) participants must have successfully completed the workshop and received a Green Belt certification. This criterion was important because it demonstrated a successful project was completed and a level of competency was achieved. A completed project meant that Lean Six Sigma was implemented within the nonprofit, creating equity among the final participants. Perspectives of those with a deeper understanding of the Lean Six Sigma subject matter would provide robust interview data. According to Morrow (2005), all qualitative sampling is purposeful as “participants are deliberately selected to provide the most information-rich data possible” (p. 255). Conversely, incomplete, or low-rated projects reflect a lower level of subject matter competency and an increased likelihood that Lean Six Sigma was probably not implemented upon returning to their nonprofit organization. A project that was not completed meant that implementation was unsuccessful making it unlikely that future similar sector-bending activities will take place in the organization. Once this
criterion was applied across the 60 participants, 46 participants were eligible to advance to the second phase.

Table 1

Alumni Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Received Green Belt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019 Spring</td>
<td>5 organizations</td>
<td>10 participants</td>
<td>8 Green Belts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019 Fall</td>
<td>5 organizations</td>
<td>11 participants</td>
<td>9 Green Belts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 Spring</td>
<td>5 organizations</td>
<td>10 participants</td>
<td>0 Green Belts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021 Spring</td>
<td>4 organizations</td>
<td>8 participants</td>
<td>8 Green Belts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021 Fall</td>
<td>3 organizations</td>
<td>6 participants</td>
<td>6 Green Belts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022 Spring</td>
<td>4 organizations</td>
<td>7 participants</td>
<td>7 Green Belts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022 Fall</td>
<td>4 organizations</td>
<td>8 participants</td>
<td>0 Green Belts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 total cohorts</td>
<td>30 organizations</td>
<td>60 participants</td>
<td>46 Green Belts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table lists the entire population of alumni. Of this population, a sample of 46 were tiered by project score and invited to participate in this study until the goal of 10 participants was reached.

I ranked the remaining 46 participants into three tiers to assist with inviting groups systematically, controlling the number of participants in the study. As each group was invited and participants agreed to join the study, I could control the number of participants who agreed to be in the study. With a goal of 10 participants, I tiered the 46 participants by ranking their completed projects. I ranked the projects with the assistance from the instructor who scored the projects excellent (tier 1), above average (tier 2), average (tier 3). The ranking was based on completion, implementation, and successful use of the tools. The ranking helped me invite each group of participants one at a time so that I would get to 10 participants without going over the goal and making this study
more difficult to complete and conduct. It would also eliminate chances of having to choose or turn participants away. Additionally, and similarly to the first Green Belt criterion, successful projects increased the likelihood that Lean Six Sigma would continue to be led by the nonprofit leader within their organization.

I then proceeded by inviting the first tier of participants. Once I confirmed which participants were in and which were out, I moved to the second tier to continue recruiting. Once those participants were confirmed, I moved to the third tier until I reached 10 participants. A description of the 10-participant sample is found in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Final Participant Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Project Tier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2019 Spring Children’s Hope</td>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>1 Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2019 Spring Children’s Hope</td>
<td>Genevieve</td>
<td>1 Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2019 Spring Mother’s Clinic</td>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>1 Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2022 Spring Barney Mental Health</td>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>1 Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2022 Spring Barney Mental Health</td>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>1 Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2019 Fall Taylor Health Care</td>
<td>Jazmine</td>
<td>2 Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2019 Fall Taylor Health Care</td>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>2 Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2022 Spring Stable Homes</td>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>3 Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2019 Spring Champion Family</td>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>3 Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2022 Spring Potter School</td>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>3 Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The table lists the participants and their organizations that were final subjects of this study.
Data Collection

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviewing was the method for data collection to best answer the research questions pertaining to the personal experiences of nonprofit leaders with sector-bending. The use of in-depth interviews for qualitative research is supported by Marshall & Rossman (2016) as stated, “A study focusing on individual lived experiences typically relies on an in-depth interview strategy” (p 102). Conducting interviews was a logical and practical approach to collecting data from nonprofit leaders as they ascribe meaning-making to their shared experiences relating to the phenomenon of sector-bending.

I used a phenomenology-influenced approach to interviewing due to the research question which seeks to understand sector-bending from the nonprofit leaders’ own perspective. Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) describe phenomenology as “a term that points to an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors’ own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects” (p. 30). The authors add that the interviewer and interviewee are co-constructors of knowledge (p. 22) which requires the interviews to be intentional. A phenomenological approach describes the experiences “as precisely and completely as possible” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 31) and such examination requires participation from the participants in the form of multiple in-depth interviews.

The most logical way to be able to understand and describe the experiences of nonprofit leaders as they engage in sector-bending, is to have an in-depth discussion with them and document their story. I conducted multiple interviews with the participants which allowed for probing questions and iterative questioning using rephrasing of
questions to eliminate contradictions and increase clarity (Shenton, 2004). Multiple interviews and secondary questions, follow up questions, and probing questions gave me the richness needed to build a description of the participants’ experiences. While Marshall & Rossman (2016) posit that interviewing has limitations because it depends on trust as the main feature of the interviewer-interviewee relationship and trust takes time to build. My existing relationship with the participants overcomes this limitation because a strong sense of trust has already been built over the course of the workshop and after. My involvement with the workshop added to the rapport I had with the participants that was beneficial for scheduling and conducting rich interviews. The participants were aware of my study while they were attending the workshop and were anticipating my outreach post class.

For the main source of data, I conducted two rounds of in-depth interviews and one focus group. The first round of interviews were individual, one-on-one interviews that lasted 60 minutes each and were conducted virtually using Zoom. The second round of interviews were also individual interviews lasting 30 minutes each using Zoom as the platform. The last round of interviews was conducted as a focus group where all participants were invited to be a part of the meeting via Zoom as the platform. Two focus groups were conducted to accommodate schedules. Since all the participants are current career individuals, they are familiar with Zoom, email, and other digital platforms, making using electronic communication and platforms the most convenient method. At the time of this study, in-person meetings were discouraged and rare due to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Conducting virtual interviews was the most common and acceptable way of meeting and interviewing participants during the data collection timeframe.

Figure 3
**Data Collection**

The participants were invited to the first round of interviews via email (see Appendix D). The invitation to interview was anticipated by the participants since I had already mentioned my research study while they were attending their workshop. In the invite email, I clarified that the purpose of the study was not an evaluation of the workshop nor of their performance, but for the goal of documenting their personal experiences as professionals. For the participants who replied with interest, I sent a second email with the interview questions, confirmed the date and time and included the Zoom link in a Google calendar invite. The interview questions were copied from the interview guide (see Appendix E) and began with a brief definition of sector-bending as well as the research question. The first round of interviews was semi-structured in order to make sure the voice of the nonprofit leader was represented over the researcher’s, that is, the nonprofit leader’s perspective on sector-bending should unfold as the participant perceived, and not as the researcher perceived (Morrow, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As described by Galleta (2013), “Semi-structured interviewing allows a systematic and iterative gathering of data where questions are arranged in a protocol that evokes rich data but is also focused for efficient data analysis” (As cited by Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 150). The first round of interviews was recorded to the Cloud,
transcribed with Zoom and Otter AI, and uploaded into NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) for thematic analysis.

The second round of 30-minute follow up interviews were also semi-structured, and the purpose was to clarify the ideas, language, and to assess the findings thus far from the first round of interviews and analysis, allowing a deeper reflection and accuracy to take place. To achieve this, the interview focused on how well the researcher’s interpretations reflect the participants’ meanings (Morrow, 2005). Invitations to join the second round of interviews were sent via email with the transcription from the first interview attached should the participant want a refresh of what was said in the previous interview. The invitation email (see Appendix F) included a preliminary list of themes that emerged from the first complete round of interviews. The participants were given this ahead of time so they would have ample opportunity to reflect on the themes. The themes were used as the guide for the interview. The second round of interviews were also recorded to the Cloud, transcribed in Zoom and Otter AI, then uploaded into NVivo for thematic analysis.

The third round of data collection was conducted as a focus group. Since all of the participants are career professionals, it was more convenient to conduct two focus groups so the participants could join one of the two according to their schedules. The purpose of the focus group was to bring together the participants to create synergy that would add to the richness of the data collection. Morrow (2005) writes, “Focus groups can be a forum for researchers to present emerging data and receive correction, direction, and feedback” (p. 254). The emergent themes from the first two rounds of interviews were presented to the groups and the participants were asked to comment and reflect on the themes. The focus groups also included the instructor. The instructor was present to reunite with the participants so that he could add his reflection into the
discussion. The focus groups were 60 minutes in length and were conducted via Zoom. The meetings were recorded to the Cloud, transcribed within Zoom and Otter AI, and uploaded into NVivo for thematic analysis.

**Table 3**

*Table of Interviews Conducted*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Attended By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Round 1</td>
<td>1:1 Interview</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round 2</td>
<td>1:1 Interview</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round 3 Focus Group 1</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
<td>Jenna, Kimberly, Bob, Jazmine, Cindy, Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round 3 Focus Group 2</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
<td>Cynthia, Scott, Maria, Instructor *Genevieve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Three types of interviews were conducted, and the details of the meetings are depicted in the table. Two participants were not able to attend Focus Group 2 due to scheduling conflicts. They were Genevieve and Anne, however, Genevieve was sent the recording of the meeting which she watched and provided written reflection and responses that were added to the thematic analysis of the focus groups as though she had attended in person.

**Round 1 Interviews**

In preparation for the in-depth interviews, Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) suggest the use of an interview guide when utilizing semi-structured interviews to balance the
“thematic” and “dynamic” (p. 157). That is, the interview guide helps to induce the production of knowledge while promoting good interview interaction (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview guide for the semi-structured interviews consisted of an outline of topics to be discussed as well as a set of open-ended questions that relate back to the research questions. The interview guide was also sent to the participants ahead in the email invite. The interview guide consisted of three main sections: professional experience, experience with Lean Six Sigma, and leadership (see Appendix E).

I began the first round of interviews with a definition of sector-bending and how it will be used in this study. The definition of sector-bending was already included in the email invite, so this was a verbal reminder. I also shared how my observations in the workshops led me to my research question and the purpose of the study. I thanked them for their participation, proceeded to record the interview, and began with questions.

I started with simple demographic questions about their professional experience such as their name, title, description of their role, organization, and description of the organization as Newcomber (2015) writes, “After customary pleasantries, as the actual interview begins, start with a few extra easy, even throwaway questions to start a comfortable chat before the more serious inquires begin. To break the ice, respondents might be asked how long they have lived in the city or worked in the program, for example” (p. 498). This helps create a smooth flow to the interview process.

Next, we discussed their participation in the Lean Six Sigma workshop. We began by discussing why they took the workshop and asked them to describe their project. As we got deeper into discussing Lean Six Sigma and the tools more specifically, I used leading questions as a refresher of what the tools were and what many of the acronyms stood for since it had been up to three years from the completion
of the workshop for some of the participants. A list of tools and descriptions taught
during the Lean Six Sigma workshops is as follows:

1. Value Stream Map (VSM): useful for identifying and quantifying waste especially
   in time and costs (George, et al., 2005)

2. Root Cause Analysis (RCA): a collective set of tools and techniques to uncover
   the problem ([What is Root Cause Analysis (RCA)? | ASQ](#))

3. Supplies, Input, Process, Output: a diagram that captures critical information that
   teams agree on what is included and excluded (George, et al., 2005)

4. Cost Benefit Analysis: the process of monetizing costs of an activity to figure out
   the financial impact ([Cost Benefit Analysis (whatissixsigma.net)](#))

5. Stratification Tree: to collect information on the process to find patterns in the
   data (George, et al., 2005)

6. Data Collection: tools to collect relevant and reliable data (George, et al., 2005)

7. 5 Whys: quick and focused technique to find a root cause (George, et al., 2005)

8. Project Charter: a tool that documents the problem statement, stakeholders, and
   goals (George, et al., 2005)

9. Fishbone Diagram: a diagram that lists potential causes of a problem [What is a
   Fishbone Diagram and How Do I Use One? (sixsigmadaily.com)](#)

10. DOWNTIME: an acronym for the eight wastes (Defects, Overproduction, Waiting,
    Not Utilizing Talent, Transportation, Inventory, Motion, Extra Processing (Groban,
    2016; McGee-Abe, 2015)

11. Solution Selection Matrix: a decision-making tool that ensures that solutions meet
    project goals (George, et al., 2005)

12. Control Plan: a document that is used to hand off the improved process to the
    process owner and participants (George, et al., 2005)
13. Failure Modes and Effects Analysis (FMEA): tools used to identify ways a process or product might fail (George, et al., 2005)

14. Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control: a framework that LSS is built which helps solve long-standing business problems (George, et al., 2005)

15. Graphs: descriptive statistics that show basic information about a set of data (George, et al., 2005)

The last section of the interview guide pertained to the participants’ experiences as leaders as they learned and implemented Lean Six Sigma in their practice. The questions were developed to explore how the participants make meaning of their roles as nonprofit leadership as they attempted to deploy Lean Six Sigma in their organization.

After completing each individual interview, I used the iPhone Voice Memo application to record my impressions of the process and outcomes. Initially, I was particularly concerned with keeping track of any changes that I made with the interview questions to maintain consistency. However, I did not make many changes to the questions as the flow of the questions supported a natural flow in dialogue. If multiple questions were answered during the same discussion, I did not re-ask the question when we got to that part of the interview. I noticed that my preoccupation with consistency generates from my position as a post-positivist researcher. I wanted to make sure that each interview was treated like an experiment, making sure I recreated the identical conditions so that the data were reliable. In this process, I learned that qualitative research is not about replicating identical conditions but customizing each interview to the needs of the interviewee in order to create a comfortable experience.

After this first round of interviews, I realized that I spent quite a bit of time with pleasantries which sometimes interfered with getting through all the questions. This used up time that could have been spent digging deeper into some of the questions,
especially those that centered around leadership. However, I felt the chatter at the start of the interview was important to create the semi-structured environment that was needed to learn about the interviewee’s experiences. Less time was spent on pleasantries in the subsequent interviews.

Sending the questions ahead of time seemed to be beneficial for the participants as it had been almost three years for some participants since they had taken the workshop. In fact, all the participants reviewed the questions beforehand and several of the participants had prepared answers. It helped that the participants had given some thought around the questions ahead of time so that they could engage in dialogue without having to spend time accessing memories.

**Round 2 Interviews**

For the second round of interviews, a semi-structured process was used and the interview guide consisted of open-ended questions. The interview guide was emailed to the participants ahead of time for their review before the second interview. The interview guide listed the emergent themes that came from the first round of interviews (see Appendix F). The purpose of the second round of interviews was to capture their responses to the themes that were presented, giving the participants the opportunity to reflect, respond, and elaborate on their answers as well as clarify any language and accuracy. There were eight themes that were presented to the participants, and they reviewed them by going down the listing of the eight themes. To avoid theoretical answers and to narrow in on their personal experiences, the participants were asked whether they resonated with the theme and to expand on their experience. This was taken from Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) who state that the “what happened” questions
always precede “what did you experience?” questions to maintain a conversational flow and to keep a positive tone (pp. 158-159).

The second round of interviews were vital to gain clarity and reliability of the data as well as to perform member checking and triangulation to increase trustworthiness. The second round of interviews were more succinct and focused, as we did not need to spend as much time on pleasantries. We had already gained familiarity by the time the second round of interviews were conducted. The participants had time in between interviews to reflect and add more depth to their first answers. Similarly, the time in between interviews allowed me to adapt my questions and approach to continue to provide a safe environment that encouraged deeper reflection by the participants.

The intent of the second follow up interviews were to clarify, confirm, and expand on emergent themes. To that end, I realized that going through all eight emergent themes and their examples were too many and not necessary. I also realized that sending the themes in a linear fashion and numbering them 1-8, generated the impression that this was a list they needed to get through. The point was not to get through a list of themes, but to speak about the themes with which they resonated and why. It begs the question whether the discussion would have been different had I shared my mind mapping illustration in place of the list (see Appendix G). That way, the participants could visualize the themes instead of viewing them in a list format.

Overall, the second round of interviews did achieve its purpose which was to give the participants an opportunity to elaborate on their answers as well as comment on the themes that were generated as a group. During the second round, there were some themes that were refined and some that were eliminated because participants did not seem to resonate with them as much. This round served to pare down the original list of
eight themes to four and provide more insights into their experiences, especially in terms of leadership support.

**Round 3 Focus Groups**

While I attempted to host one focus group with all ten participants and the instructor, coordinating matching schedules for 11 professionals was nearly impossible. Instead, I conducted two focus groups, inviting five participants and the instructor to each group. I used Doodle as a scheduling app and was able to coordinate the first focus group. The first focus group was attended by five participants plus the instructor. Scheduling the second focus group took much longer and I was not able to use the Doodle app. Instead, I coordinated the focus group via email and booked it on Google calendar. The second group was only attended by three participants plus the instructor. Two of the participants were not able to attend, however one was able to watch the recording of the focus group on a private YouTube channel and submitted her written reflections via email.

The participants were sent the four themes that emerged from the second round of interviews ahead of the focus group. Once everyone logged into the focus group via Zoom, I shared my screen to read quotes supporting each theme. I stopped sharing my screen after each theme to let the participants respond. The instructor occasionally joined the conversation.

This third round of focus group interviews served to be significant in identifying the themes that were persistent throughout all three interviews. I consider these themes as the top findings as they were the most mentioned experiences that were shared by the participants. Since I used thematic analysis after each round of interviews, it was interesting to see how the journey that the themes, or shared experiences, evolved over
the process. Round 1 interviews were about getting basic questions answered and round 2 went deeper into some of the themes. Round 3 brought focus to the shared experiences of the nonprofit leaders. During the process, there were themes that were refined and some that were refined, then reverted to the original. The focus groups seemed to share that same inclination where the participants seemed to agree and build on each other’s comments. There was little direct dissension during the focus groups.

The focus group produced the synergy that it was meant to inspire. The participants were engaged, but conducting the meeting virtually meant that participants had to unmute when they wanted to say something. This is not conducive for emulating an in-person conversation which would have likely been less formal than the virtual format. It will be unknown if anything was lost due to conducting the meeting virtually. However, the focus groups would have likely not happened if they were to be held in-person since it took many months to schedule two agreeable dates for the virtual focus groups and conducting the focus groups was too important not to have taken place for this study. This is in addition to the timing of this data collection period which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic which also made virtual meetings the preferred method of interaction.

Document Sources

Document analysis was added to the data collection. These documents were produced by the participants as a requirement of the Lean Six Sigma workshop and demonstrate the use of the tools and in most cases, their competency of using the tools. This documentation will serve as background to the consumer of this research for understanding the content of the workshop. The documents were produced by the
participants as part of the deliverables needed to complete their projects. These
documents can be found in Appendix J.

Observations

The first workshop launched in January 2019 with five nonprofits represented by
two individuals from each organization for a total of 10 participants. From the very first
day, I acted as an observer diligently taking notes and sharing my observations and
feedback with the workshop’s professor. Over time, my observations began focusing on
the questions that were asked during the workshops as well as the unsolicited
discussions that were had at the conclusion of the weekly workshops. I especially noted
the challenges that some of the nonprofit leaders faced with the subject matter,
specifically with project selection and adapting the Lean Six Sigma tools into their
practice. I observed and took field notes at each semester-long workshop in Spring and
Fall of 2019, Spring of 2020, Spring and Fall of 2021, and Spring of 2022.

In addition to a prolonged engagement and as mentioned above, observations
also played a part in increasing credibility in this study, identified by Morrow (2005) as a
way to enhance the interpretive status of the evidence (p. 256). I had observed all five
cohorts on a weekly basis over the span of 15 weeks. I completed these observations
one cohort at a time over the duration of four years (2019-2022). During these
observations, I had taken field notes particularly about the challenges the participants
expressed about learning the content of the workshop as well as the implementation of
Lean Six Sigma into their organization. Therefore, observations serve as a secondary
data source that can be used to provide context as well as provide verification of what is
said during the interviews (Morrow, 2005) and thereby increasing credibility.
Pilot Study

In 2019, I conducted a study as part of course work in the doctoral program. The 2019 study served as a pilot for this dissertation as it was a “small-scale” exploration that informed this dissertation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 151). In the 2019 pilot qualitative study, the learning and behaviors of nonprofit workers were examined post training and Green Belt certification. Findings indicated high levels of learning and application of the Lean Six Sigma tools along with experiences of tension and resistance while learning and applying the tools.

Data Analysis

According to Neumann (2014), “When analyzing qualitative data, we develop explanations or generalizations that are close to concrete data and context… The explanations tend to be rich in detail, sensitive to context… Our goal is to organize specific details into a coherent picture, model, or set of tightly interlocked concepts” (p. 479). I used thematic analysis as my chosen framework to present this study’s findings. Thematic analysis looks for the similarities in the data, or “chunks’ of varying size – words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting” (Miles and Huberman, 1994:56 as cited in Neumann, 2014, pp. 480-481). Since there were two sets of interviews and two focus groups, analysis took place three times as described in the next section.

Data Analysis of First Round of Interviews

For the first round of interviews, after each individual interview was completed, the recorded video (which included audio) from Zoom was uploaded to Google Drive and then uploaded again into Otter AI to get a written transcription. Zoom also provided a written transcription of the interviews and those were also kept in a Google Drive as
back up. The transcripts from Otter AI were oftentimes more accurate, so it was the preferred platform. The written transcript from Otter AI was uploaded to a Word document in Google Drive and then imported into NVivo for analysis. I performed open coding (Neumann, 2014) where I made a first pass by re-watching some of the videos and reading all of the transcripts to assign initial codes using NVivo.

After the first open coding was completed in NVivo, there were 15 preliminary categories. Upon analyzing these categories, many were found to be duplicates, so they were collapsed into one another, leaving eight categories to be further analyzed.

The preliminary categories required a second pass, called axial coding which Neumann (2014) defines as “A second stage of coding of qualitative data during which the researcher organizes the codes, links them, and discovers key analytic categories” (p. 482). In performing axial coding on the 15 preliminary categories, I was looking for how the codes coherently related to one other and used mind mapping to further categorize concepts that cluster together (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neumann, 2014). Mind mapping uses “intuitive arrangement of concepts into branches, using key words to make connections between portions of information” (Fearnley, 2022, p. 4). Using mind mapping as a technique during the axial coding process found linkages across the codes and dropped others. Therefore, after analyzing the first round of interviews, there were eight emergent themes that the second round of interviews were based upon.

Performing analysis of the data proved to be difficult, especially during open coding. The coding seemed to just follow the sections of the interview guide, which was built on “pre-understandings” from my time observing and participating in the LSS workshops (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 97). Therefore, it was important to perform additional analysis to get to the deeper meanings. Moving on to axial coding made it a bit easier to find the common themes and to group them under one heading. As a form
of triangulation, I also performed mind mapping with the data which created a visual of the categories and themes and helped to clarify the final themes.

Data Analysis of Second Round of Interviews

The eight emergent themes were emailed to the participants ahead of time and were reviewed during the second 30-minute interview. After each interview, the video recordings from Zoom were uploaded to Google Drive and then into Otter AI. Otter AI produced a written transcript that was uploaded into Google Drive and imported into NVivo. I used NVivo to code the second round of interviews so that the quotes were captured according to the eight themes established from the first round.

Again, I performed open coding and axial coding using the transcripts. Then, I listened to the recording while using mind mapping. This level of reflective analysis and reworking of data was to reveal connections and relationships (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). After analyzing the eight themes that guided the interview, four major themes emerged after Round 2 interviews.

Analyzing the second round of interviews was smoother than the first round because the data were already centered around eight themes. Therefore, the purpose of analyzing the second round was to move towards a more specific set of themes that explained the experiences of the nonprofit leaders. Some of the themes from the first round of interviews were not mentioned at all in the second round and that also helped to refine this set of data into four new themes. I learned that multiple analyses are helpful, otherwise there is the possibility of ending up with the themes that mimic your interview guide instead of looking for emergent themes.
Data Analysis of Third Round of Interviews of Focus Groups

There were four themes that emerged from the second round of interviews and these four themes were sent to the participants ahead of their focus group. I created a slide deck to share with the participants where each of the four themes was presented in a separate slide with supporting quotes from the participants that were transcribed from the second round of interviews (see Appendix H). I showed the first theme, read the quotes, and gave the participants time to respond to the theme as well as to each other. Many times, the participants built upon one another’s contributions which created synergy and rich dialogue. After all four themes were shared with the group, I asked the participants if there was anything they would like to add and if there were any questions. I ended the meeting with words of gratitude.

The focus groups were recorded to the Cloud on Zoom, downloaded into Google Drive, and uploaded into Otter AI for transcription. The transcription was saved to my Google Drive and imported into NVivo. I used open coding and followed up with manual coding. This analysis refined the four themes that guided the focus groups into a final set of four themes that describe the experiences of the nonprofit leaders as they engaged in sector-bending.

My approach to this final round of analysis was a bit different than the other two because I used manual coding instead of mind mapping. By this point, the dialogue was tightly centered around four themes that analysis was a matter of finding commonalities across all the participants’ answers, which made it simpler than the other rounds. I ended with four final themes that showcase the journey of the analyses as well as describe the key shared experiences of the nonprofit leaders.
Quality Measures

There are several measures taken in this qualitative study to ensure trustworthiness, including addressing concerns about credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Moon, et al., 2016). This section elaborates on how I used triangulation and member checking to enhance the quality of my data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness.

Credibility and Confirmability of this Study

Credibility, according to Morrow (2005), “can be achieved by prolonged engagement with participants; persistent observation in the field… researcher reflexivity; and participant checks” (p. 252) all of which are employed in this study. Credibility is the “truth value” in the findings that can be confirmed through member checking (Moon et al., 2016, p. 3) Together, the in-depth interviews, focus group, observations, document analysis, and employing a pilot study served as multiple data sources which is considered triangulation (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004) Triangulation provides “richness, breadth, and depth of the data gathered” by providing information that may help to explain the attitudes and behaviors of the participants that adds context to their interview responses (Morrow, 2005, p. 256). This use of multiple data sources added to the trustworthiness of this study.

By the end of each workshop, I had become familiar with the participant’s organization, their role and position, as well as their personality and approach to leadership to a broad degree. During the workshop, the participants are asked to discuss the challenges and “pain points” within their organizations, which reveal much about their perspective on leadership and change. I observed their experiences over 15 weeks, from identification of a project to the final presentations of control plans. This allowed me
to have a deeper insight into the participants’ personal experiences in addition to in-depth interviews. Likewise, the participants had come to know me and my background, and we built a rapport with one another. The workshops held in 2019 were in-person and workshops help in 2020 - 2023 were virtual.

After interviewing individual participants twice, I conducted a focus group that brought together eight of the 10 participants to discuss the themes found throughout the first and second round of interviews as a rigorous method of member checking. Again, the focus group is an “overlapping method” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71) that increases credibility by asking the participants for direction, correction, and feedback to ensure the researcher’s interpretations are as close to the participant's experience as possible (Morrow, 2005). Having a focus group adds strength to the quality measures of this qualitative study by adding a multiple data source that confirms congruence with reality (Shenton, 2004).

Lastly, transferability refers to the “degree to which the phenomenon or findings described in one study are useful to theory, practice, and future research” (Moon et al., 2016 p. 4). This study was created with the intent to describe the experiences of nonprofit leaders using qualitative methods that could inform practice. The methods can arguably transfer to future studies and be replicated to build on this study.

Limitations

As with most qualitative studies, there is a small sample size. Also, the participants were all from southern California, mostly San Diego. Additionally, the size of the nonprofit organizations was unusually large compared to the average size of 501(c)(3) in San Diego and across the United States. Both the sample size and the organization size were not reflective of nonprofits in the US.
While also a strength, my involvement with the workshop may also make this study subject to personal bias and subjectivity. That is, I agreed to participate in the workshop because I believed that Lean Six Sigma could help nonprofits improve their operations and would lead to higher performance and outcomes. I realized that I had taken up a position that aligns with the ‘pro’ sector-bending side of the debate found in the literature. It was not until I witnessed some of the participants demonstrate a resistance to learning the methodology that I realized my position and assumptions. I bracketed my own assumptions and throughout the conducting of my research.

Lastly, participant answers may have been subject to social desirability bias so that their answers may reflect what they think others are polite instead of the complete truth (Nederhof, 1985). This may also be due to my position as an administrator of the workshop as well as the instructor’s position as the teacher and the participants wanting to give answers that they think might please us. Efforts were made to keep the interviews professional yet safe to compensate for social desirability bias.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study is focused on the experiences of nonprofit leaders in sector-bending after receiving training in Lean Six Sigma. The interest arose from my observations of a workshop taught at the University of San Diego that certifies nonprofit professionals with a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt certification upon completion of a successfully applied project. I watched the participants grapple with learning the new methodology and how to implement Lean Six Sigma tools in their organizations, only to realize later that what the grappling they were experiencing was a studied phenomenon, often referred to as sector-bending. While there is an abundance of literature on the phenomenon of sector-bending, what was missing were the lived experiences as told by the nonprofit leaders themselves when faced with sector-bending on the front lines.

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from these data. The presentation is organized into five main sections. The first provides background on the organizational sample and the interview participants. The second section then reviews the results of the first round of interviews, themes 1-1 through 1-4. The third section reviews the results of the second round of interviews, themes 2-1 through 2-4. The fourth section reviews the results from both focus groups, themes 3-1 through 3-4. The fifth section reviews the final findings which is a synthesis of all themes combined, themes 4-1 through 4-3.

Sample Organizations

The data were collected from nonprofit leaders representing seven nonprofit organizations in San Diego. The nonprofits vary in mission, purpose, size and scope. The organizations are all registered 501(c)(3) organizations. Table 4 provides an overview of these organizations, their most recent budget, headquarters location, core
activities, and number of employees and volunteers that was retrieved from their latest 990 documents.

**Table 4**

*501(c)(3) Organizations Represented in this Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Established/Ruling year</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Budget range</th>
<th>Range of Employees</th>
<th>Range of Volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother's Clinic</td>
<td>1969/1973</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>Health - Community clinics located across San Diego serving culturally diverse populations</td>
<td>$75M or above (2020)</td>
<td>501+ (2020)</td>
<td>0 (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Found Years</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Sector Description</td>
<td>Budget Range</td>
<td>Employees (2019)</td>
<td>Employees (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table compares the demographics of the nonprofit organizations that were represented in this study.

All the participating organizations are well-established and comparatively large.

According to NCCs data from 2016, they belong to a small group of 5.4% of all public charities with a budget of $10M or higher (retrieved from https://nccs.urban.org/publication/nonprofit-sector-brief-2019#size, 2019). Five of the organizations also operate in a space with significant for-profit competition (higher ed, real estate, health care).

In San Diego County, there are 12,458 registered 501(c)(3) organizations (retrieved from...
https://digital.sandiego.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=npi-stateofnp, 2022). Organizations with budgets less than $5 million comprise 91 percent of San Diego’s nonprofit sector, which places the six of the seven organizations in this study in a small group of 9% of San Diego’s registered 501(c)(3) organization (excludes Barney Health as it spans multiple counties). Additionally, in San Diego County, 57% of staffed nonprofits have fewer than 10 employees, which places six of seven organizations in this study to be staffed significantly higher than half of the nonprofits in the county (this excludes Barney Health because it is headquartered outside of San Diego). It is interesting to note that the average salary for a person in operations (which is where LSS would be organized) is $55,000. The cost for the USD workshop was $700 per organization to certify two individuals with Green Belt status.
Note: The figures above show the budgets of registered 501(c)(3) organizations in San Diego County and in the United States. The budgets of the organizations in this study fall into the red category of $10 million or more and are represented by the yellow stars.

Study Participants

There are 10 individuals in the sample who were (at the time of the workshop) employed at the seven nonprofit organizations listed above. Two of the participants have since left their respective organization and one participant was promoted to a different department. Profiles of the participants are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Nonprofit Leader Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Years in position</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Years in non-profit</th>
<th>Years of work history</th>
<th>Steps to CEO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Champion Family</td>
<td>Social Enterprise Manager</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Mother's Clinic Medical Education Coordinator</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Spring 2019</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Stable Homes Operations Manager</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fall 2021</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>Barney Health Senior Director of Continuous Quality Improvement</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Spring 2022</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>Barney Health Director of Administration</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>Spring 2022</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>Children's Hope Chief Operating Officer</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Spring 2019</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genevieve</td>
<td>Children's Hope Director of Programs</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Spring 2019</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>Potter School Director of Development</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Spring 2022</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazmine</td>
<td>Taylor Health Care Project Manager</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Fall 2019</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Taylor Health Care Director of Quality and Compliance</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Fall 2019</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This table lists information on the individual backgrounds of the study's participants.*

**Bob**

Bob is the Social Enterprise Manager at Champion Family. He has been in his role for five years and is responsible for improving the financial performance of the organization through new and existing programs. Bob holds two master’s degrees in economics and business administration. He started at an institution that was part of the Inter American Development Bank and then moved to World Bank where he was in project management supervising infrastructure projects in Latin America. After moving to
California, he began working in the nonprofit sector where he felt closer to the impact of his work. Bob was part of the first 2019 spring cohort where he and his coworker worked on decreasing client wait times at reception as their LSS applied project. Bob stated that he felt disconnected with this project because it was a special assignment outside of his regular duties. Bob and his coworker were also participants in my 2019 pilot study where we studied the sustainability of LSS tools in nonprofits. He has not completed a comprehensive LSS project since, but uses some of the concepts. Overall, Bob finds value in his LSS learnings, but has stayed skeptical in the straight-forward application to nonprofits.

Maria

Maria is the Medical Education Coordinator for Mother’s Clinic and at the time of her project, she was a patient experience coordinator. Maria earned a degree in business administration because she had a passion for employee relations. Maria spent 10 years in hospitality before transitioning to health care, focusing on the patient experience and is now a leader in the clinic’s inaugural physician residency program. She believes she has a good professional balance having spent an equal amount of time in both the for-profit and nonprofit industries. Maria was part of the first 2019 spring cohort where she worked on decreasing costs for processing pharmacy orders. Her project redirected 832 hours away from the administrative work of processing orders and onto direct patient care for a savings of over $39,000 annually. Maria demonstrated much excitement throughout the interviews and was undoubtedly a proponent of learning and implementing the LSS methodology in her department. She has been consistently using the tools and concepts in her daily work. Mother’s Clinic is one of the largest community clinics in the county, but it does not have a formal LSS department or program.
Cindy

Cindy is the Operations Manager at Stable Homes responsible for leading the organization’s strategic plan through efficiencies, goal setting, and policies. Cindy has been with Stable Homes for five years and leads the Operations Department which was formed only two years ago. Her daily work is very close to what a LSS practitioner would perform and she explained that the department was in need of a new methodology in addition to the Objectives and Key Results (OKR) platform. Her current position was very fitting for attaining a LSS Green Belt. Before making the transition to nonprofit leadership, she was a banking executive and talent/acting/modeling agent. Together with her coworker, Cindy attended the fall 2021 workshop where her project focused on increasing enrollment rates for the afterschool program that is offered to residents in their housing units. Cindy was satisfied with the results of her project, but explained that since it is an annual program, it will not be able to be completed until the next enrollment period. Overall, Cindy found much value in the learnings and continues to use the methodology in her daily work.

Kimberly

Kimberly is the Senior Director of Continuous Quality Improvement at Barney Mental Health where she oversees six committees that include compliance, quality, and training. She has been with Barney Mental Health for 12 years. Kimberly is a licensed clinical social worker who transitioned to administration because of her orientation to detail and also due to her disillusionment while working as a clinical social worker. Kimberly was a part of the spring 2022 cohort and attended with her colleague, Scott, who is also a participant in this study. Together, they completed a project to increase the number of satisfaction surveys returned. Survey collection is a regulatory requirement for Barney Mental Health. Kimberly is outspoken about her disappointment with the project
that she selected, but maintains that she was still able to learn how to use the LSS methodology and tools. Additionally, Kimberly maintains her skepticism on the “Control” phase of the LSS methodology because she does not believe that improvements made during the process will be sustainable unless it becomes an explicit part of someone’s job description or if she manages it herself. As Senior Director of Continuous Quality Improvement, it is Kimberly’s responsibility to perform quality assurance which is directly aligned with Six Sigma.

Scott

Scott is the Director of Administration at Barney Mental Health where he oversees the electronic health department, technology, privacy, and most recently, strategy. Scott has a bachelor’s degree in psychology and has been with Barney for 13 years which has been his first and only career in the nonprofit sector. Scott transitioned from the corporate world after 20 years so that he could work in a sector that is mission-driven over profit-driven. Scott shares the same sentiment as his colleague, Kimberly, who was disappointed at the project they selected. However, he appreciates the learning and wants to make sure his organization gets a return on the cost of the LSS workshop. He has even expressed interest in continuing his learning and completing future projects. Both Scott and Kimberly were encouraged by their CEO to join the workshop because of the alignment with their positions. In his daily role, Scott is involved with workflows and processes that are linked to data collection. In that respect, his position is closely aligned with the practice of LSS. Overall, Tim was slightly skeptical of a full adoption of the LSS methodology at Barney Mental Health, mostly because of the amount of time it takes to build buy-in and sustainability. However, he values the benefits that LSS bring which are systematic and data-driven approaches to problem solving and process improvement.
**Cynthia**

Cynthia has been the Chief Operating Officer at Children’s Hope for 16 years, working her way up from program coordinator to the executive level. Cynthia earned a master's degree in forensic psychology with the intent to become a special agent in law enforcement. While she was waiting to enter bootcamp, she began working at Children’s Hope and found that she had a passion for the mission of Children’s Hope and decided to forgo bootcamp and stayed with the organization. In fact, the mission of Children’s Hope resonates with Cynthia’s personal journey growing up on her own since was 15 years old. In her role, she oversees operations and programs as well as responsibility for growth and development of the organization. Cynthia was part of the first 2019 spring cohort where she and her employee, Genevieve, completed a project to decrease the onboarding time of volunteers. Cynthia and Genevieve’s project turned out to be a model project that the professor of the workshop uses as a sample to new students. The results from the project were a stellar example of how LSS can improve processes that lead to cost savings – vital to nonprofits. Cynthia appreciates the learning from the workshop but admits to struggling with making LSS part of the culture and daily operations.

**Genevieve**

Genevieve’s entire career has been in the nonprofit sector where she is a mission-driven community advocate with a passion for strategy and engagement. At the time of the workshop, she served as the Director of Programs at Children’s Hope. She was a direct report to Cynthia, COO, who invited Genevieve to join her for the LSS workshop. Genevieve was excited to do so because she wanted to learn more about LSS. Genevieve and Cynthia’s project demonstrated stellar results and proved to be an example of the benefits of LSS. In fact, Genevieve, Maria, Professor Mason, and I made a presentation at an international nonprofit conference in 2019 where we presented their
final LSS projects to nonprofit practitioners who were interested in the practice and research of LSS in nonprofits. Genevieve is an outspoken advocate of using businesslike practices, like LSS, in nonprofits. She has repeatedly remarked how nonprofits are businesses too and how the work of creating profits and sustainability is vital to nonprofits. Since 2019, Genevieve has moved on from Children’s Hope and currently works as a community engagement manager for a large nonprofit and serves on the board of a national nonprofit. She continues to use the tools and methodology in her practice and volunteerism. Unfortunately, Genevieve was not able to attend a focus group, so she watched a recording of the second group and sent her responses to the topics via email. Her responses were incorporated into the analysis.

Jenna

Jenna is the Director of Development for the Potter School and has been with the organization for two years. She is responsible for the philanthropic program which includes annual and major giving in her respective department that support scholarships, programs, and capital. Jenna has been in the philanthropy sector for most of her career, hoping to harness the much-needed nonprofit skill of fundraising and to one day become an executive. Jenna was part of the spring 2022 cohort and was the fourth participant ever to work in philanthropy and take the workshop. However, she was the first to complete a successful LSS project in development. Jenna was transparent about her struggles with implementing LSS in her department because of the strong silos that exist at her school making interdisciplinary collaborations nearly impossible. Jenna also spoke quite a bit about the disconnect when integrating a profit-driven methodology in a mission-driven organization. However, Jenna was one of the few to demonstrate pride in attaining the Green Belt as she perceived it as great professional development.
Jazmine

Jazmine is the Project Manager at Taylor Health Care and has been with the organization for eight years. She worked her way up through the organization, whereby she became the Project Manager upon completion of her bachelor’s degree. Jazmine is responsible for managing outcomes of special projects focusing on data and efficiencies. Jazmine was part of the Fall 2019 cohort with Anne, also a participant in this study. Jazmine reported to Anne and together they completed their LSS project around improving the process flow for documentation for patient intake. Jazmine skillfully realized that LSS was not about tackling big systemic problems, but small problems where you can dissect the process. Jazmine has an uncanny ability to quickly identify root causes and work through processes step-by-step, which is necessary for a LSS practitioner. She has maintained the same philosophical position throughout all her interviews which is that leaders, first, need to support the methodology and others will follow. Jazmine has not wavered from this position, even to the point of noticeable frustration that her organization has not yet fully embraced it.

Anne

Anne was the Director of Quality and Compliance and Privacy Officer at Taylor Health Care at the time she attended the workshop and during the first round of interviews. By the second round of interviews, she had already left Taylor Health Care to start her own business as an audit specialist. While at Taylor Health Care, she oversaw the departments of quality, compliance, and informatics in her 5-year tenure. After earning a degree in communications, Anne held various jobs in private and public service before finally becoming a nurse. She was promoted from being a clinical nurse to an executive at Taylor Health Care in part due to her unique passion for quality and compliance. Anne realized that her skill and interest in quality and compliance is quite
unique, and she attributes it to her curious character. Anne showed a deep understanding of leadership during the interviews and what kind of leadership was necessary to support a LSS culture. She spoke quite a bit about listening, training, and critical thinking - activities she did daily. Anne did say that she was fortunate to have this opportunity for professional development and that it helps to professionalize her in her new consultant role. Unfortunately, Anne was not able to attend a focus group.

Results from Round 1 Interviews

The ten participants were emailed an interview guide ahead of their first one-hour semi-structured interview. The interview guide consisted of three parts - background, experience with LSS, and LSS through the lens of leadership. Analysis was conducted on the data collected from the participants and eight themes emerged.

Table 6

*Emergent Themes from First Round Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1-1</th>
<th>Motivations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want to help improve the organization by increasing my professional development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1-2</th>
<th>Lean Six Sigma learnings and outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I learned how to approach solutions slowly and carefully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t jump to solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be patient and calm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collect the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify the problem by listening to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lean Six Sigma gave me a voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation of the Lean Six Sigma tools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1-3</th>
<th>Lean Six Sigma in the nonprofit context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lean Six Sigma was an odd fit, but I got value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The nonprofit environment is uncertain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1-4</th>
<th>The role of leadership in Lean Six Sigma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Lean Six Sigma takes a tremendous amount of buy-in and collaboration. It is important for leaders to understand the LSS methodology in order to keep it going. Leaders set the tone.

*Note:* This table lists the final themes resulting from the first round of 1:1 interviews.

### Theme 1-1 Motivations

There was a consensus from all ten participants of wanting to improve their organization. Attending the workshop was a way to learn new strategies to take back to the organization to improve performance. Most of the participants were encouraged by their CEO or leader to join the workshop. As such, there was a shared tone of gratitude for the opportunity and the learning. When I congratulated the participants on achieving a Green Belt, there were mixed reactions. Some did not realize that they achieved a recognized certificate, and some were proud of their accomplishments. However, they all relayed an appreciation for the new learning. Anne explained, “I felt like it was a very, very good professional development opportunity for me to be able to take the class and be able to walk away with those skills.” Jazmine stated, “I think being in the world of nonprofit and looking at how to make things more efficient, I wanted to do something, to challenge myself to streamline our practice.” Both Bob and Jenna expressed appreciation by stating respectively, “The thing I like most, and the thing that I most appreciate about Lean Six Sigma, is having all sorts of different tools to understand where you’re at, and then turn that around and communicate it to somebody else” and “It has made me more confident, I feel more confident presenting the findings and speaking up for myself and the community.” Cindy and Cynthia responded in terms of making the most of the learning to the benefit of their organizations. Cindy explained,
“We’re like, hey, let’s use this thing we learned in this process to see if we can improve something” and Cynthia explained,

“I think from a nonprofit perspective, as a leader, is it worth my money? Is it worth my time? It absolutely is because even if you take out all the specific tools, you’re actually making progress on something that you need to do in your day-to-day. It is totally professional and personal development, which is excellent for whoever is doing it in whatever role and there is a benefit to the organization just innately because of that…I totally am a proponent for it. I think everybody should do it.”

The participants showed gratitude for the learning and most wanted to make sure their organization received benefit from allowing them to attend the workshop. They appreciated the opportunity for professional development and the workshop even gave the participants momentum when returning back to work.

Theme 1-2 Lean Six Sigma Learnings and Outcomes

Theme 1-2 demonstrates the learnings and outcomes that were expressed by the participants during the interviews. Some learnings were tactile, and some were behavioral, that is, they changed their viewpoint or approach to decision making. Much of the learnings were expressed in a personal way that demonstrated a deep reflection on their own behaviors and approach to practice. The tone throughout this theme is one that longs for positive change and a desire to make LSS work in their organizations.

*I Learned How to Approach Solutions Slowly and Carefully*

The concept of not “jumping to solutions” was a topic in the workshop’s curriculum. This topic was also prominent among the participants. The overarching concept of arriving at solutions slowly and carefully was interpreted and explained in various ways by the participants.
*Don’t Jump to Solutions*

Maria advised, “We want to focus on the end goal, but most of the time, the angle looks completely different than what you had in your mind at the beginning.” Bob and Jazmine reflected on their experience in the workplace, “Once we understood the problem, we understood in what direction we should move with the solution” and “You have to trust the process and the steps… because it’s not going to be the same as we thought initially was going to be right…so that’s the part we struggle a lot with.”

Genevieve, who called this her “number one takeaway” from the workshop explained,

“It's always finding ways to pin it and find that solution, but that isn't the lead way. The solution is not the first answer. That’s the end result of all of the work leading up to it. So I love the concept of that. We’re not looking for the solution now, and I love that it's admirable in all industries and all departments in all ways, and the versatility of how it can improve any organization, any business, even your personal life. I think the versatility is just mindful.”

Jenna reflected,

“It forces you to see sometimes your shortcomings when you wanna have those quick answers and move on to your next… This project forces you to think, and sometimes we get so bogged down and thinking about those quick, easy wins that we don't take the time to think about, what's this larger systemic issue?”

*Be Patient and Calm*

Being patient and calm throughout the Lean Six Sigma process, which at times can be lengthy, was a portion of advice that some of the participants mentioned. Maria and Genevieve advised respectively, “You want to focus on everything, because
everything needs that. It will. We just have to be patient and take it one step at a time”
and “Be patient with yourself. I think it proves a lot of theories and natural tendencies
that we have as human means to make assumptions to get the right answer. So be patient, be collaborative.”

**Collect the Data**

Making effort to diligently collect explicit data was a major concept of the
workshop’s curriculum and a practice that is rote to the LSS methodology. There was
consensus with the participants that collecting and analyzing data is important, however,
some participants admitted that it is not a routine practice in their organization. Scott
explained, “We’re pretty complex. Getting a project done in a standardized way is nearly
impossible because everybody’s got their own little bent on why they’re different… As a result, we don’t get projects done. We have great ideas, we get stuff implemented, not always with the data-driven decisions that Lean Six Sigma offers. So sometimes we go off half-cocked.” Cynthia stated, “And we’re really getting better with data and stronger there and using that to make decisions. I feel like we usually just kind of muddle around and try to find a way but nothing that’s really strategic or science based. Kind of like, I have a good idea. Let's see how to implement it.” Jazmine concurred, “It [the LSS workshop] just taught me to look for data.” Interestingly, two participants commented on data collection being the responsibility of the leader. Cynthia reflected, “When I’m really looking at data and really talking about what we need to put in our system to gather that data, I feel like I’m trying to implement, as a leader here, is just the constant improvement.” Anne focused quite a bit of her interview on reflecting about the importance of leadership in data collection. She reflected and explained,
“I think one of the first things is that leadership has to be the one to say, stop working on what you think, let's get some data. Leadership has to set the example of data-driven decisions.

I was one of those people and still am. We all are to a point that you believe what you think, and I would come up with what I thought the problem was and wouldn't listen to anyone else. This is the problem and this is how we're going to fix it. So it [LSS] has taught me to sit back a little and don't come to conclusions before you've collected data.

I impress that on others because I see people coming to me going ‘this, this’ and ‘I think this is it’. I'm like, so how long does it take for that to happen? Have you ever measured that? Have you actually gone out and looked because so many things happen from hearsay and complaining.”

**Identify the Problem by Listening to Others**

While the emergent theme of being slow to solutions was being discussed by the participants, many of them commented on the importance of understanding the problem by taking the time and making the change to listen to others. The workshop curriculum includes sessions on defining the problem, which was impressed upon the participants as evidenced in the following quotes. Maria explained, “We did have to do vent sessions. After that, we got to move on. But we allow them to share with us what some of the barriers are.” Jazmine stated, “The buy-in is always it for me. My approach is, what can I do to make your job easier? It's the little things. It's just hearing them out and hearing their frustrations.” Kimberly described her experience, “I feel like that's the one thing we do pretty well is ask the right questions and dig deep. Maybe too much, to be honest.” Genevieve’s experience and advice was the following:
“I think the beauty of [Lean Six Sigma] was how to really break things down to a more granular level, instead of it being one-way directional communication. Turning that into bi-directional. I think the most important thing to do is pause, because, to be honest, I think senior leadership talk a little too much.”

Lastly, Jenna described her frontline experience,

“I got the most dramatic qualitative research from somebody that is university wide that's not [department] specific and that's what really was the A-HA lightbulb moment. It reminded me of the importance of reaching out to my colleagues and hearing what else is happening and how other people view their jobs and to not make assumptions.”

**Lean Six Sigma Gave Me a Voice**

An emergent theme from the first round of interviews was that after learning Lean Six Sigma, the participants felt they were better equipped to communicate with stakeholders and leadership. Bob described his positive experience with LSS as one that taught him how to systematically communicate with others throughout the Green Belt project. Bob explained,

“If you're not able to communicate what's wrong to the people who will be in charge of implementing or advocating for a solution, then you have nothing. You have an angry toddler shaking his fists. So there's so much emphasis in this method and Lean Six Sigma about communication, essentially understanding something and communicating what that something is. That's probably one of the things that I like most is being systematic and being able to communicate where you're at.”
Similarly, Jazmine noted the systematic approach of LSS enabling her to communicate better with her respective audiences and increase buy-in.

“So it's really framed my daily workflow. Getting everyone on board to understand here's what we're currently doing, this is where we want to be, and this is how we're going to do it. Here are the steps and this is how it affects you. It really streamlines the way I communicate and the way I put things forward to whoever my audience is at the time.”

In addition to her role at Children’s Hope, Genevieve also serves as a board member at a local nonprofit. She reflected on how her communication with fellow board members was enhanced by practically using the tools from her LSS learnings. She reflected,

“I serve as a board member and we were working on the strategic plan a few weeks ago. We were talking about changing a price rate and we were talking about the media. We just started getting into some of the math concepts that were taught in Lean Six Sigma and the whole group was blown away. That's totally different data that we thought we were working with!”

Anne spoke specifically about the LSS tool called Root Cause Analysis and how that gave her the instrument she needed to facilitate a serious discussion surrounding a sentinel event.

“I can compel a bunch of people to come into a room and say we've had an event we need to call the debrief and I bring the root cause analysis tool. I hand it out to everyone there so they can follow along. Then we just work through it. It really does focus a group to throw emotion out of it and look at it because everyone walks in with their preconceived notion. They come in with tunnel vision and they
come out with a different perspective as to how we got here. It's very, very helpful in helping people think about things differently to expand their knowledge.”

While Jenna recounted similar experiences about how LSS increased her ability to communicate effectively with stakeholders, she detailed a more deeply personal reflection related to her professional growth.

“I don't like attention so I think this project has impressed upon me the importance of forcing those conversations and forcing myself into the meetings where the development perspective needs to be seen. What tools do I remember using that were useful for me versus what tools were useful for the viewers, for the stakeholders, and helped them see? When I put the historical data on a graph, that was helpful for them. I don't think they cared whether it was a histogram or whether it was a bar chart, they didn't care about that. They cared about seeing the data and they were impressed that I use different tools. Did that help me so much? It didn’t, but that was impressive to them and that professionalized me. So I think that's important. The fact that now I would be comfortable using those tools and having that vernacular.”

Lastly and similar to Jenna, Cindy used the word “confident” when describing how LSS has changed her, “[I am] more confident in the outcome of these initiatives. I have all the tools necessary that I can fall back on and implementing some of these strategies to improve our processes. [I have] more confidence as far as being able to implement it.”

**Evaluation of the Lean Six Sigma Tools**

Table 7 depicts which Lean Six Sigma tools were mentioned by each participant in the first round of interviews. If participants deemed the tool as helpful, it is marked with
an “x”. If they deemed the tool as a “good” tool, but unhelpful for their project, it is marked with an “o”. A complete description of the tools below can be found in Chapter 1.

Table 7

*Evaluation of the Lean Six Sigma Tools by Nonprofit Leaders After Earning a Green Belt*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Maria</th>
<th>Kim</th>
<th>Anne</th>
<th>Bob</th>
<th>Gene</th>
<th>Sara</th>
<th>Cynth</th>
<th>Jenna</th>
<th>Cindy</th>
<th>Scott</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VSM</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIPO</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBA</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srat</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5why</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chart</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutn</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contr</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMEA</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMAI</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graph</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This table lists the Lean Six Sigma tools that were taught in the workshop and how many times they were mentioned by the participants.*

X = useful; O = good tool, but not for our project
A complete description of the tools is found in Chapter 1, page 56.

1 An overview of the tools can be found in Chapter Three

2 FMEA was not taught during the workshop. It was mentioned by Anne who learned FMEA on her own reading of the LSS handbook.

Theme 1-3 Lean Six Sigma in the Nonprofit Context

Theme 1-3 describes the dialogue when the participants pointed out the difference of being in the nonprofit sector. The participants demonstrated an awareness of their status and expectations as a nonprofit leader in relation to implementing LSS in their organization. Most of the dialogue referred to the difficulty of fitting LSS into their organization and culture.

*Lean Six Sigma is an Odd Fit, but I Got Value*

For some participants, there was the perception that Lean Six Sigma was not a good fit in nonprofits. They pointed out that the nonprofit context was in opposition to the profit-seeking methodology. However, deeper discussion revealed that the misalignment may be from the projects that were chosen and not necessarily because of their nonprofit status. Some participants were dissatisfied with the projects they chose for the class because they did not find many of the LSS tools to be useful. It is interesting to note that after every critique, the participants followed up with a compliment. That is, even though several participants were disappointed in the project they chose to work on, they still found value in learning the tools as well as the bigger concepts. For example, Bob explained,
“This for me was a special project. This isn't what I do normally. So when I went back to my regular job, the congruence between method and job description wasn't so much there. I think the precondition for that sort of repeated process is that it makes it easier to implement services, like people moving through a system or goods, like boxes of food moving through a pantry, those two processes are probably easier to apply the Lean Six Sigma methodology to as opposed to data moving through a process. I would imagine different methodologies are better for that.”

Scott and Kimberly were regretful about the project they chose for the workshop. Scott stated, “We learned a lot, but it wasn't the right project… but there is definitely value for us.” Kimberly wished they could have changed her project as the workshop progressed, but could not due to the curriculum’s time restraint. She explained,

“We could have picked other things that maybe have been easier to fit into the tools because some stuff is so not measurable. We could have done a donation thing, we could have done something where we're tracking time and making things more efficient. So as you're learning, you're like, this would work well for like these things and maybe not these things. There's a lot of nebulous stuff that just won't work for this.”

Anne shared a detailed critique of the learning dynamics based on her personal experience of grappling with the application of the LSS tools.

“That's one of the challenges is to make the jump from manufacturing to healthcare, you have to get liberal with what you think is the process or open your mind more. Once you've turned it into a process, then you can break it down.
The only thing that was difficult with Lean Six Sigma was there were times I felt that because of our circumstance, we were really trying hard to stick a square peg in a round [hole]. So I had to be creative to find ways to make it apply but I don't think that's a flaw in the system. I think that's just forcing you to go above even regular critical thinking and to go a little deeper. I think that's part of changing your brain into how to think like Lean Six Sigma.”

Jenna and Cynthia first offered their critique followed by a complimentary statement about LSS. Jenna stated, “I don't think that they're all applicable in how they were presented for social science. I used the tools but not explicitly in the way that it was written out and it helped me think about it.” When asked whether she uses the tools, Cynthia stated, “I kind of do some of it” and continued to explain, “I think the hard part is from the social service industry piece, especially because we have so much case management and individual people we're trying to serve, is how to balance the black and white.” Cynthia followed up with a positive critique, “I think that's why I love Lean Six. When I went through it, I was like, yes, I want this process, step by step, it makes it so clear and easy. It just paints that picture and really kind of takes all the questions out of it.”

**The Nonprofit Environment is Uncertain**

Throughout the interviews, some participants made reference to the unique characteristics of being a nonprofit as a factor in implementing LSS into their organization. They reflected about their LSS experience specifically as a nonprofit leader. Genevieve stated that even though her organization is a nonprofit, it is still a business and can benefit from implementing LSS as a business strategy. She reflected,
“My biggest takeaways were the fact that hundreds of thousands of organizations worldwide implementing Lean Six Sigma, and whether it's the car industry, the health care industry, nonprofit, the tools are there to help any business and operation and at the end of the day whether you're a nonprofit or for-profit, it's still a business.”

Jenna reflected on her experience as a nonprofit practitioner where she pointed out that nonprofits are not typically selfish, so that implementing businesslike strategies might feel wrong. However, she explains it is a matter of changing the nonprofit leader’s mindset to accept the concept of sector-bending. She explains,

“If you look back on the Toyota model and the readings, that one little lever impacts the rest of the production line and so it's just very different because I think we come from this collaboration – everybody put our hands together, everybody’s voice matters. I don’t think we’re Me, me, me, me, me focused … but we’re also not quick to blame. It's retraining ourselves. Some people have to retrain themselves how to talk about us versus me and I. It's the opposite. Responsibility, almost.”

Scott explained that money was not a driver, but the benefits to continuous improvement that were the goal. He stated, “Money is an important one. But really what matters is does it streamline the process? Organizations like Barney that are tethered to government contracts and have tons of oversight, have tons and tons of paperwork. For us to be able to streamline that paperwork for staff is so meaningful because not only does that improve retention and make them happier, but it also can have a direct impact on their ability to provide more services to kids.” When asked if being data driven was something he wanted to implement at Barney, Scott responded, “I do with the caveat that it's not the most important thing, because like anything that you take to the extreme,
there'll be negative consequences. I think it's vital that we be data driven, but that we also do it in a way that doesn't exclude that if we don't hit that mark, it doesn't mean you don't do that programming.”

Interestingly, Cindy reasoned that the LSS profit-seeking methodology was a good strategy for Stable Homes to pursue. She wanted her organization to adopt the LSS mindset in order to be competitive. She recounted her experience moving from a for-profit organization to Stable Homes, “It was a big shocker. When I first started here, the mentalities were so different. It's not business-driven, bottom line. They do look at those things, but it's not what drives them. We don't really talk about profit.” Cindy added, “That's one of the mindset changes we're trying to do here, because we have to compete with for-profit developers, we need to be just as quick and fast and nimble and agile as they are if we want to continue to get those RFPs.”

**Theme 1-4 The Role of Leadership in Lean Six Sigma**

Theme 1-4 reveals the experiences of the participants as it relates to leadership. The participants converged on the need for leadership buy-in and most stressed the importance of how leaders need to familiarize themselves with the LSS methodology to increase sustainability. The tone from the participants was strong around the importance of leadership.

*Lean Six Sigma Takes a Tremendous Amount of Buy-In and Collaboration and Sustainability*

During the first round of interviews, many of the participants stressed the importance of buy-in and collaboration from peers and leadership for LSS to be sustainable in their organizations. To enroll in the workshop, the participants were
required to attain leadership support by having an executive champion. Additionally, to keep their projects moving forward during the workshop, the participants were required to collaborate with peers and process owners who had a stake in the process being examined and improved. This theme emerged as one of the top challenges experienced by the participants, as Scott sums, “So much time building consensus and getting agreement. It's important, but boy, is time consuming.”

It is Important for Leaders to Understand the LSS Methodology in Order to Keep it Going

Maria explained that leaders must create buy-in from the staff for purposes of change management and to keep the new process going. Maria explained,

“[Leaders] have to come and sell it to the rest of the company, to the rest of the staff, because if they [the staff] don't believe in it, it's not going to work. If you don't have the buy-in within a week or two, they go back to their old ways.”

Bob concurred that in order for LSS to be sustainable, leadership must have a general understanding of LSS in order to support it as a business strategy. Bob advised,

“I think leadership has to understand what Lean Six Sigma is enough to know whether there's a match at the largest organizational level, find the right projects, champion those projects with financing or whatever it needs, clear out any barriers they need, all the way through project completion. Leadership could then try to keep the methodology alive within the organization.”

Jazmine reiterated this theme several times throughout her interview. She emphasized the need for leadership to understand the concepts of LSS in order for it to be adopted by the organization. She explained,
“I feel like if they [leadership] experienced what we went through, they would have a bigger understanding on how to tackle the everyday little task in the minutia of it all. I would love for them to go through it and just apply it to their own department, apply it to their own practice. Even if it’s not something that they want to use, they get their minds moving a little bit to improve whatever they want to improve.”

Jenna expressed the challenge she faced during LSS implementation of not having executive support. She attributed the lack of leadership support to the lackluster implementation of her project. Jenna stated, “I think what would have made this project really exciting was if I had the buy-in of the AVP to make that long term change. I would think I need more people to buy into the process at higher levels.”

Lastly, Scott reflected on how LSS improved leadership involvement:

“They [leadership] need to be more involved in making data-driven structured decisions. That’s where I think our stuff falls apart. What we think are good ideas, we don’t necessarily do enough of preventing to make sure it was the right idea to implement. Even if it is a good idea, I don’t think we do a really good enough job of making sure that we’re communicating properly to staff when we’re rolling it out. That was a big learning for us, we really have to be more careful. We have to not assume what people know. Lean Six Sigma helps us to uncover what people don’t know.”

**Leaders Set the Tone**

Cynthia summarized this theme by explaining, “I feel like the leaders kind of set the tone. If they don’t believe in or understand Six Sigma, then it doesn’t work.”

Jazmine reiterated the need for leaders to set the example in order to increase sustainability,
“Leadership has to play a role to make sure we stay on track, because projects tend to have people be very excited in the beginning. But when it gets into the minutiae, and the grind, people drop off, so leadership has to keep it moving, keep it forward, and keep the culture that this is what we do. If you don't set the example that this is what we do, we don't make decisions willy nilly. How do you expect your staff to also work through data-driven things and stick with these projects and see them through? Because it's easy to stop halfway and go, ‘That sounds like a good solution. We're gonna go off this direction now and work on it.’”

Kimberly described her personal experience with leadership support of her project as well as the challenges related to sustaining LSS in her organization. She reflected,

“I felt like having that sponsor was having someone who believes in what you're doing. That puts some nice weight and leadership around it. If I say I want to do this, he's [the CEO] like, I got your back – go make it better, totally on board. I didn't get a lot of pushback from our leadership. I think we have the mindset of continuously wanting to improve processes and always trying to do better, be better, be more efficient. That's the culture we have.

You have to get everyone who's a decision maker to buy into it, because one of those people is likely going to be handed the process or the control. That's the part that is my biggest worry, or stress.”

Genevieve explained that leadership is dire in order to position LSS for long term sustainability. She explained,
“I think they [senior leadership] play a very big role. Enabling their team to do it because it takes time, it takes bandwidth, it takes a little bit of finances, it takes encouragement and support. If they don't have the capacity or the assets and resources to do it, the senior leadership are the ones who really depict that. So without their buy-in, and without their support, whether that's the mental, physical, emotional, financial, it doesn't happen. I think that's the truth, really.”

Results from Round 2 Interviews

In preparation for the second round of interviews, participants were sent all the themes that resulted from the first round of interviews ahead of time. The themes were presented in a list format #1 - 8. The list format was to allow the participants to pick and choose which topic they wanted to discuss. During the 30-minute interview, they were asked to respond to topics to provide clarity and better reflect the experiences of the participants. The resulting themes second round of interviews are listed in Table 8 and are described in the following section.

Table 8

*Emergent Themes After Second Round of Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2-1 People are the challenge to implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2-2 Growth: This work is important to the sector and mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2-3 The concepts vs. the tools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* This table lists the emergent themes after the second round of 1:1 interviews with all participants.
Theme 2-1 People are the Challenge to Implementation

For the first round of interviews, the participants reflected on the importance of buy-in from leadership. During the second round of interviews, the participants explained further about the challenges to attaining buy-in. Specifically, the participants had much to say about individuals who posed a challenge to completing the project and implementing LSS in the organization.

Jenna reflected, “People understand the issue. But it is very slow wheels to move it. And she [the boss] needed to. It wasn’t until we had a retreat in December that she heard this challenge arise from other people in my position and realized that there might be some weight to this… And so that's very slow moving and has not changed yet.”

Scott stated about collaborators, “It’s really interesting how much opposition we’ve run into… I was surprised how protective and how protected people get when you ask to offer to help improve the system that they own, they get very sort of defensive.”

Kimberly reflected on her challenge with controlling the new process once the LSS project is complete. She described how others may not have the same amount of investment as she did, causing failure in the new process. She explained, “I almost have to assign a person to monitor that they’re monitoring, right? Like, it feels like they can't ever let it fully go. Unless they’re super invested in it. That's the problem. Like someone’s got to be super invested in it.”

A famous quote that was taught in the workshop came from Dr. Edward Demming which was paraphrased as, “Blame the process, not the person”. This quote advises leaders to focus on the process in order to lead objectively and assumes that it is easier to change a process than it is to change a person. Leaders feel like they have control of process change but little to no control over human behavior. Anne described, “While you don't blame the person, sometimes there is a person that is part of the
problem. So trying to work that out into not blaming the person but also addressing the
issues that that person brings to the table that are not systemic problems. They’re
specifically one person problems because it does happen. I think that's challenging as
well. People are the problem people. Yeah. Darn emotions.” Anne continued:

“...trying to get people to stop and collect the data. That's the biggest problem is
that it's hard to get people to work for simple things that you could knock out in a
week or two. The process works but trying to get people to come along with you
who have not taken the class, I think it's the most difficult part.

My biggest frustration was that people just kept sliding back into their own things,
and leadership didn't push them. That's one thing the system isn't set up for. It's
not supposed to be how to untangle people's emotions about their perception of
the solution to actually look at it pragmatically.”

Theme 2-2 Growth: This Work is Important to the Sector and Mission

A consensus of the participants agreed that Lean Six Sigma is beneficial for
nonprofits to implement particularly because it leads to growth and financial strength.
Maria stated, “Lean Six Sigma is important in a nonprofit. [When] the worst comes, it's
[LSS] just here. As soon as you learn Six Sigma, you know better… you know better.”
Genevieve agreed, “It's just beautiful to continue to advocate on behalf of it [the nonprofit
sector]. I think that the nonprofit and for-profit environment is uncertain. And that makes
Lean Six even more crucial and critical to understand and to have in place.” Lastly,
Cindy similarly stated, “I believe incorporating the Lean Six Sigma method and a lot of
things that we do will only help us and strengthen us moving forward so we're
sustainable and scalable as we grow.”

Participants gave additional context why Lean Six Sigma is beneficial for
nonprofits. They believed LSS has the potential to increase financial stability which is
vital to mission achievement. Participants expressed the desire to increase margin which they also felt was contrary to being mission driven. Anne explained, “...nonprofits still have to be sustainable, which means they still have to work efficiently. If you’re not working efficiently, you're wasting money.” Bob concurred:

“I think ensuring that a nonprofit shows profit is so important and other people don’t. Any one in leadership in a nonprofit has to ensure that the nonprofit is profitable. Even if the revenue comes from government grants, or foundation grants, or donations, wherever it comes from, the revenue needs to exceed the cost. If it doesn't, for long enough, that nonprofit will cease to exist. Now, I don't know in what way that contradicts being mission driven at all. If anything, being profitable supports the mission because you don't have to lay off people, you have program continuity, all of the good things that come with sustainability.”

In sum, Jazmine stated, “At the end of the day, it's still a business.”

Theme 2-3 The Concepts Versus the Tools

There was unanimous consensus that completing the Lean Six Sigma workshop and learning the skills was beneficial to their role within their nonprofit organization. All participants found the concepts, tools, or both to have a positive impact in their position and to the subsequent benefit of their organization. However, to what degree and how Lean Six Sigma has benefitted them varied widely.

In her role, Cindy is responsible for workflows and positioning internal operations to support the procurement and program delivery of Stable Homes. Prior to the Lean Six Sigma workshop, the operations department at Stable Homes used several established methodologies and frameworks such as project management and Objectives Key Results (OKRs), as an existing culture of process improvement was already present. Cindy listed several of the LSS tools as helpful stating, “I love the Value Stream Map.
That's definitely very helpful. The Five Whys is something we've been doing... we've kind of got that one down. SIPOC is good, too. I love the Project Charter. Definitely, that just sets the whole tone for the entire project and helps everybody kind of rally around the same things and understand and it's clear."

Similarly, Maria stated, “What sticks out for me are the Five Whys, the Five S's and Root Cause Analysis. As I told you, in my experience, I had to learn how to simplify things. The Five Whys was a perfect one." Maria explained that in her role, she uses a version of the tools to train physician residents and since her time with them is limited, she simplifies the complexities of the Lean Six Sigma tools to help the residents complete their training program.

As Social Enterprise Manager, Bob stated,

“\ The DMAIC, of course, is really useful. That's essentially understanding that framework. And within that, I mentioned during our last interview, that the value stream mapping was probably the best step to understand the problem.
Especially the little post-it with the flowchart and getting everybody involved in the process sitting at the table together, you realize that even different people involved in the process have different understandings, what the steps are and the reasons for those steps. The five whys – super useful. And the project charter, it's useful at the beginning, just so that the project members are aware of what's going on, they have the same expectation and they hash those out. You can communicate back and forth between the project team and the champion or the sponsor about where they are in the process.”

Likewise, Cynthia gave an example of the value she found in one of the tools, “I thought the Value Stream Map was fun. Drawing it – because we didn't have the system to create it pretty and so [we used] a whiteboard. It was impactful because ours was so ridiculous – the time it took and so it was just like, oh my God!” Cynthia was referring to
her experience after completing the Value Stream Map activity during the workshop and discovered that the onboarding time for volunteers was unacceptably long. Cynthia elaborated that while she found value in the tools, she measured the usefulness in terms of sustainability at her organization. In short, she is no longer using the tools as she learned them but knows that she can access the tools by referring back to her textbook. She stated, “I don't know if right now, I would agree with the helpful part. Because if you asked me to go do any of these [tools], or the majority of them, I'd go back to my booklet and pull it out.” Cynthia often referred to the sustainability of Lean Six Sigma in her organization as a measure of transformation, but ended by compromising that she is using the concepts of Lean Six Sigma over the individual tools. She stated, “Putting out this stuff is just more of a different format. We don't do it in the same way. But concepts are there and it is helpful…it's more about the concepts. I'm not talking about Lean Six Sigma as much with the day to day in the office, but more of just how I'm leading in my expectation and the planning and structure that goes along with it.”

Jazmine and Cindy recounted similar experiences. Jazmine stated, “Some of them [the LSS tools] I use, some of them I don't use, depending on the situation we're in. But for the most part, we'll use Lean Six Sigma in general.” Cindy explained, “So every project, I've incorporated a piece. I don't use them [LSS tools] from start to finish, but I use specific pieces of it when I do incorporate it. So we're seeing pieces of it being used not systematically from A to Z, but pieces of it being utilized.”

Kimberly reflected on her post-experience, “I think people just intuitively do that beginning stuff without the charts. It's weird. I think the stuff is happening, it's just not happening as part of the official process. It doesn't feel textbook enough. Generally, we are doing the process. It just sometimes feels like Scott and I will be teasing ourselves.”

Genevieve also reflected on a post-workshop experience. “I was working at a board meeting and I was helping on a strategic plan for another nonprofit in San Diego.
And I had shared [with the board], I'm gonna put my Lean Six Sigma out. This might not make sense to you but let me explain it and it really does show a value."

Jenna prescribed future value, "If I have to grow a board or alumni, whatever it is, I can look back and use it [LSS]. I have this new toolbox. I have these resources that I can deploy at any time."

It is important to note one outlier comment by Bob who carefully explained the extent to which the Lean Six Sigma tools are useful by clarifying that they must fit the situation by describing:

"There has to be a fundamental match between the method and the problem. For example, if I'm trying to figure out how to drink water from this bottle. You tell me that psychoanalysis is a great tool to do it. I would argue that God would say as the All-Knowing entity, there's a disconnect between the problem and the solution. That's not innate to me or you. It's just a bad choice. So I think some of these [tools] tend towards that.

"Something like the cost benefit analysis has to be very context specific. We were trying to improve the process of intake at our family resource center. And you'd have to have a credible way of monetizing the problem. So that you could monetize what it looked like after the solution was implemented to see the cost benefit analysis. There wasn't a way to credibly monetize that. And it would have taken too long. It would have been a waste of time."

Several times did Bob posit the need to match the tool to the problem. He explained that the Lean Six Sigma tools were not always transferable to every situation, particularly when dealing with service and people. He said, "So you're trying to fit a square peg into a circle. And it's not worth the effort. I mean, we went through these exercises, but sometimes it was just such a disconnect that you don't actually get any practical value."
Theme 2-4 Data: Becoming Data Driven

Lean Six Sigma is a data-driven methodology requiring collection and analysis of data to guide decision making. There was consensus among the participants that there was value in exercising data collection and analysis during the workshop. However, similar to the first round of interviews, participants were admittedly challenged by regularly collecting data and relying on it to make decisions. Participants found implementing a data-driven process to be overall challenging. However, when it came to discussing whether their nonprofit status was a factor in being data driven, all agreed that being a nonprofit did not make a difference to the need and desire to be data driven.

Being Data Driven Requires Buy-In, Especially From Leadership

Cindy reflected that, “Everybody wants to bypass the analysis” and Cynthia concurred, “People are scared of data. If you don't have the data, how do you know things are working?” Anne elaborated, “Getting people to actually collect the data [is a challenge]. When you're listening to others about the problems, being able to somehow untangle or get them to let go of their preconceived notions about why that won't work with the data, that's where the real crux of it is.”

Similarly, Jenna reflected on her experience:

“Based on the data, I found something that we weren't able to identify at the beginning. Not having assumptions or being able to question the assumptions that you came in with, coming in with an open mind – I think that is something I want to make sure that's there. Lean Six Sigma definitely gave me a voice. The data was very important because when you talk about adult learners that I was interacting with – the deans, the assistant Deans, some are visual learners, some are qualitative, some are
Genevieve reflected on her experience:

“You can have all the feel goods you want and you can follow the mission, but you can't sustain if you don't have the data. One of the spaces that I really enjoyed seeing was our senior leadership making a lot of decisions without data. Then, getting to collect and show it, gave that background – that institutional knowledge and a data-driven approach to decision making that was easier to speak up to them [leadership]. It's not that I didn't have the confidence that I couldn't speak to them, it was that they started seeing things differently. This is what the data says and that's something that was never collected or shown. That was a complete driver to make very clear decisions and help us speak to some people who really were more focused on qualitative and how they've done it before without the data. So this was a really unique space for myself and our frontline staff that we had involved in the scope of work and in the entire charter.”

**Balancing Being Data Driven and Mission Driven**

Some participants brought up being data driven versus being mission driven. Scott explained, “There's not a big conflict between being data driven and mission driven, I think it's a matter of how you present the data so that there has to be a dialogue and you have to set the productivity targets fairly in a way that drives your mission. But that doesn't mean you can't use the data.” Although most agreed with Scott, Bob seemed to be an outlier when he said,

“The challenge to balance being data driven and mission driven – I think a lot of
these things are kind of tropes. In the nonprofit world, data is a for-profit thing and mission and passion are a nonprofit thing. I think they are tropes. I'm not sure if people think about all of that all that much.”

Emergent Themes from the Focus Groups

In preparation for the focus group, participants were sent the four themes that resulted from the second round of interviews ahead of time. Two focus groups were held to accommodate the participants’ schedules. Additionally, the professor of the workshop attended both focus groups. The first focus group was attended by five participants and the second were attended by three. Two participants, Genevieve and Anne, were not able to attend either focus group. However, Genevieve was able to watch the recording from the second focus group and she provided her thoughts and reflections that I have incorporated into this analysis. During the 60-minute focus group, participants were asked to respond to quotes from the slide deck with the four themes and quotes. In doing so, the four prior themes were refined and expanded on to provide a final set of focus group themes based on interactions of the participating nonprofit leaders. The resulting themes from the focus groups are listed in Table 9 and described in the following section.

Table 9

Emergent Themes from Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Grp 3-1 The Lean Six Sigma tools are useful in nonprofits when they are applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Grp 3-2 Sharing Lean Six Sigma with others increases buy-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Grp 3-3 Lean leads to profits which are important to nonprofit leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus Grp 3-4  Nonprofit leaders want Lean Six Sigma to be sustainable in the organization

Note: This table lists the emergent themes from the focus groups.

Theme 3-1 The Lean Six Sigma Tools are Useful When They are Applicable

All Lean Six Sigma tools are useful as long as they are applicable to the problem. This is a theme that was prevalent in the focus groups and throughout all sets of interviews. Participants were in agreement that all Lean Six Sigma tools and concepts are useful in nonprofits as long as they are the right tools to help find solutions for a particular problem. Several participants explained that it is not their nonprofit status that makes a tool ineffective, but whether it is the sensible tool to use for the problem or process needing improvement. Several explained why some LSS tools were more useful than others and some forecasted future usefulness for various LSS tools. However, the overall consensus was that the LSS are useful to nonprofits:

“It [project] was a survey project. So it [LSS tool] didn't apply there. But there are other places that it's useful for us.”

“I would say about cost benefit – I think that it matters where you're making investments in technology. There is definitely an argument where the cost benefit analysis will be useful.”

“You just need to know what to use which tools when and I don't think I will know that until I get a few more of these under my belt.”

“I think it's important to at least use a form of the tools.”

“I don't think religiously use them, but for me, if I'm working on something, I do go back and follow it. Just in my way. I have to simplify and get the staff to the point I want them to get to. Sometimes it's creative.”
“But the specific tools have been very, very useful that we've used over and over again.”

“Even though some of these tools don't perfectly fit the current initiative that you're working on, it does get people thinking differently. It kind of sparks some thoughts as you go through the process. I really didn't think of it that way or I've never thought of it that way. I think it's definitely a mind shift that's happening.”

“It's these tools that are going to help us get to our outcome.”

Theme 3-2 Sharing Lean Six Sigma with Others Increases Buy-In

During the focus groups, the participants continued the discussion about the importance of buy-in for sustainable implementation. The theme of the necessity of buy-in from others was prevalent in all previous interviews. The conversation during the focus group elaborated on buy-in by using the strategy of sharing and educating others on the Lean Six Sigma methodology in order to gain the buy-in needed to move projects and process improvement forward. The participants mentioned buy-in is needed from both leadership, peers, and subordinates in order for Lean Six Sigma processes to be successfully implemented and the best way to gain it is by educating and teaching others the LSS methodology. The following quotes support this theme.

“A lot of them [staff] didn't know what we were talking about. Simplifying it and doing small projects to show them this is what we do and this is how you can implement it.”

“The more we educate, the more we teach them or we show them these tools – not going through the full process – but knowing that it's there and available when they have a project or something they want to do.”
“I do agree that there's this education, it's not like everything is streamlined and smooth.”

“I don't think they [senior leaders] realize the time and effort it takes to change a single process and all the tools that we have to put it into place.”

“I'm explaining why we're trying to do this and what we're trying to do for you because really, it's for them. We just want it to go as smoothly as possible.”

“We're sitting there getting to know them, who they are, and what they want to do… be that helping hand. Even though some people on the outside didn't know what was going on. They're like, what are you doing? Sometimes people don't want to ask, they just assume.”

One participant reflected on the challenges she experienced when buy-in was not present with leadership:

“I didn't get their buy-in so when presenting the challenge and opportunity, they weren't as receptive. I'm glad that we found this challenge, but it has taken considerable effort to get the attention of the rest of the units to understand this.”

One participant suggested a “cheat sheet” could accelerate the buy-in process by educating others on the LSS methodology in a short period of time:

“Is there something like a cheat sheet on Lean Six Sigma for nonprofits that we, or any participants, can then refer back to or share with other colleagues back at
the organization? Because it's very hard to summarize everything we've learned with others who have not gone through the course."

**Theme 3-3 Lean Leads to Profits Which are Important to Nonprofit Leaders**

Lean and Six Sigma are two different methodologies. Lean focuses on eliminating waste allowing for organizations to maintain or increase outputs with limited resources. The participants agreed that Lean provides them the opportunity to increase their financial stability and improve profitability. They found Lean to be a fit for nonprofits and were vocal about the need for financial stability and profits in order to run the organization. The following quotes support this theme.

"I think it [Lean Six Sigma] fits well with nonprofits overall because we are mostly running pretty thin. We need to be able to do a lot more with a lot less. This program helps us do that. This methodology helps us do that."

"Anything that can help us do more with less should be welcome."

"Nonprofits need to make money too, so we can sustain ourselves."

The participants, while agreed profits are important, added to this the struggle they experience to balance the mission of program delivery as leader of a nonprofit who must balance mission with margin:

"I think people talk about nonprofits as people who have a mission. They don't realize that you need to make a profit to be sustainable."
“It's hard to talk numbers with our doctors because you’re focusing on a human being and their health. We need them to understand why we're doing what we're doing. It's a tough conversation, but it's true. We don't want to cease to exist.”

“There's that fine line of... where do you decide to spend the money? How much is that going to help us to actually do our mission and dedicate time there.”

“We're not here to just keep adding money to the pot and not having to worry about the other side [program delivery]. There's the ratio that you have to worry about and all these different variables that are really then putting the puzzle pieces together.”

“I think the folks on the support services business type of organization understand the value of processes like Six Sigma and why profitability or at least staying in the black is so important. There is a shift between the two. When push comes to shove, we're really going to be understandably focused on serving the kids and we should spend however much we need to spend to meet that mission. So, there is a little bit of tension there. We can't do your mission if we're not in business.”

“I work with doctors, where they're passionate about what they do. They're here to serve the community because they really are passionate. If not, they would go somewhere where they can make more money. But they want to give back to their community along with working and serving. They focus on that. Those things are fighting against each other, which they shouldn't. It shouldn't.”
Theme 3-4 Nonprofit Leaders Want Lean Six Sigma to be Sustainable in the Organization

The participants spoke at great lengths during the interviews and focus groups about various ways to achieve successful implementation. It was clear that sustaining implementation has been a challenge to both the three-year alumni and the recent graduates. Nevertheless, after completing the LSS workshop and attaining Green Belt certification, a majority of the participants agreed that LSS is something they want to implement and sustain in their organization. The overarching theme to successful implementation is that nonprofit leaders want Lean Six Sigma to be sustainable in the organization. All participants found value in learning Lean Six Sigma and wanted to think of ways to keep it going as part of the culture.

One participant explained, “And so that's been the biggest challenge is just how do we keep it going? How do we keep refreshing on using these tools and the momentum of implementing and building it into the fabric of what we do at the office?”

Another participant suggested for his organization, “We're doing that stuff. The challenge that we have had is keeping people focused on the order of operations and not rushing them. That's what we need to do.”

Interestingly, two participants suggested that building a team of LSS staff, relinquishing some of the responsibilities, as a way to keep it in the organization, “Part of the challenge is resources of the nonprofit. If we had enough people here who could be a bigger driving force to do Lean Six Sigma projects, period, they just stick to the process, we would increase our bench strength.”
The second participant agreed, “I think it would be so nice to have kind of a team over here that understands where we’re coming from having gone through the program.”

Specifically, the top LSS concept of becoming more data driven was raised as top priority for sustainability. Altogether, the participants shared that they wanted to continue using data to drive decisions and to slow down the rate at which staff jump to solutions without proper data. The participants describe their experiences, sometimes referring to a “shift” in mindset, in the following quotes.

“And so we were moving in that direction. Hopefully, the data part will get easier and easier as we go. It’s another mindset shift that we were going through… and that mindset shift kind of ties in with Lean Six Sigma.”

“We are not good at using any of the tools but shift into [being] data driven, asking those questions first, and trying to get that information to start testing something to see if it works… figuring out what the baseline is to move from there. So a little shift in that has been through concepts.”

“We’ve definitely adopted data. Everybody is now utilizing a lot more data. I think we’re embedded in it. That’s really nice to see. Now it’s the tweaking or making sure that how we collect the data can produce what we’re asking. That’s next level, which is fun.”

**Final Findings**

Each round of interviews and focus groups were coded and analyzed separately, resulting in three sets of emergent themes. This next section will review the final findings resulting from the analysis of these three sets of themes. There are three major findings,
labeled 4-1, 4-2, and 4-3, that will be discussed that synthesizes the entirety of this study.

Theme 4-1 Learning and Outcomes

**Root Cause Analysis Tool is Useful**

The LSS tools were discussed in all of the interviews as a way to assess learning and application. The participants recalled which tools they found useful and described how they applied the tools. Questions about the tools were asked specifically, but they were also mentioned throughout the discussions of other topics by the participants. When the participants were given a list of the 15 tools that were taught and applied during the workshop, they identified the Root Cause Analysis tool as the most mentioned, followed by the Five Whys, and the Fishbone Diagram. The Root Cause Analysis, Five Whys, and Fishbone Diagram are related to each other as they are all brainstorming activities that help to identify the root of the named problem. Identifying the root of the problem helps to target viable solutions that take place during the Improve phase of the DMAIC. These tools are taught during the Analyze phase of the DMAIC. At least four of the participants commented that they were already familiar with the Root Cause Analysis because it is a tool that is commonly used in their organizations, particularly following sentinel events. The Root Cause Analysis and its related tools can be used on any type of problem regardless if the problem involves time, risk, or cost savings.

**I Use the Tools When Applicable**

Most of the participants claimed that they use the tools, but just not as consistently or often as they would like in their practice. These participants demonstrated a desire to have a thriving LSS culture but have yet to do so. They suggested that there
is a benefit to adopting a LSS culture and that is why they would like to have such a culture as well as to use the tools.

The theme, I use the tools when applicable, are supported by the following quotes that were taken from all three rounds of interviews:

“I don't think that they're [the tools] all applicable in how they were presented for social science. I used the tools but not explicitly in the way that it was written out and it helped me think about it.”

“I don't know if right now, I would agree with the helpful part. Because if you asked me to go do any of these [tools], or the majority of them, I'd go back to my booklet and pull it out.”

“So some of them [the LSS tools] I use, some of them I don't use, depending on the situation we're in. But for the most part, we'll use Lean Six Sigma in general.”

“So every project I've incorporated a piece. I don't use them [LSS tools] from start to finish, but I use specific pieces of it when I do incorporate it. So we're seeing pieces of it being used not systematically from A to Z, but pieces of it being utilized.”

“The only thing that was difficult with Lean Six Sigma was there were times I felt that because of our circumstance, we were really trying hard to stick a square peg in a round [hole]. So I had to be creative to find ways to make it apply but I don't think that's a flaw in the system. I think that's just forcing you to go above even regular critical thinking and to go a little deeper. I think that's part of changing your brain into how to think like Lean Six Sigma.”
“I don't think religiously use them, but for me, if I'm working on something, I do go back and follow it. Just in my way. I have to simplify and get the staff to the point I want them to get to. Sometimes it's creative.”

“Even though some of these tools don't perfectly fit the current initiative that you're working on, it does get people thinking differently. It kind of sparks some thoughts as you go through the process. I really didn't think of it that way or I've never thought of it that way. I think it's definitely a mind shift that's happening.”

The usefulness of the tools was a consistent topic throughout the interviews and several participants pointed out that many of the tools did not apply to their project being the reason the tools were not useful. However, the overarching impression was that even if the tools were not applicable, they may be applicable in the future and that LSS still remains a beneficial methodology to employ.

The following quotes provide evidence that while the participants may not use the tools systematically, there is value in LSS tools:

“It's these tools that are going to help us get to our outcome.”

“You just need to know what to use which tools when and I don't think I will know that until I get a few more of these under my belt.”

“Lean Six Sigma is important in a nonprofit. [When] the worst comes, it's [LSS] just here. As soon as you learn Six Sigma, you know better... you know better.”

“I think it's important to at least use a form of the tools.”
“I kind of do some of it... I think that's why I love Lean Six. When I went through it, I was like, yes, I want this process, step by step, it makes it so clear and easy. It just paints that picture and really kind of takes all the questions out of it.”

“My biggest takeaways were the fact that hundreds of thousands of organizations worldwide implementing Lean Six Sigma, and whether it's the car industry, the health care industry, nonprofit, the tools are there to help any business and operation and at the end of the day whether you’re a nonprofit or for-profit, it's still a business.”

To this end, Bob stressed the importance of the tool matching the problem in order for the LSS project to be successful and sustainable in the organization. Bob explained that the LSS tools should be applicable to the problem that the workshop participants are attempting to improve. In his experience, not all the tools were applicable and suggested that the LSS methodology in its entirety may not be applicable. The format of the workshop is that all tools are taught and are required to be practiced by the participants despite the different contexts. Then, they must attempt to apply each tool to their respective project regardless of the type of problem they are trying to improve. In Bob’s words,

“There has to be a fundamental match between the method and the problem. For example, if I'm trying to figure out how to drink water from this bottle. You tell me that psychoanalysis is a great tool to do it. I would argue that God would say as the All-Knowing entity, there's a disconnect between the problem and the solution. That's not innate to me or you. It's just a bad choice. So you're trying to fit a square peg into a circle. And it's not worth the effort. I mean, we went through these exercises, but sometimes it was just such a disconnect that you don't actually get any practical value.”
Bob’s response and position stands out among the other participants because he described his experience with the application of the tools as being challenging. He stressed the importance of matching the tools and the methodology with the organization’s problem they are trying to solve. He raised this as one of his concerns with the transferability of LSS into nonprofits.

I Use the Lean Six Concepts

The participants spoke about using the Lean Six Sigma concepts in addition to (or in place of) the tools. The concepts that were mentioned during the first round of interviews were:

- I learned how to approach solutions slowly and carefully.
- Don’t jump to solutions.
- Be patient and calm.
- Collect the data.
- Identify the problem by listening to others.

During round 2 interviews, the participants were asked to elaborate on the tools they used and whether there was a difference between applying the concepts versus applying the tools. The answers confirmed that the concepts were very much in use by the participants in their organizations. Many claimed that the LSS concepts have changed their approach to decision making and leadership. Some explained that they preferred to use the concepts over the tools because it was not necessary to perform an entire green belt project in order to improve a process, make a change, or solve a problem. Use of the concepts is evidenced by the following quotes:

“So it's really framed my daily workflow. Getting everyone on board to understand here's what we're currently doing, this is where we want to be, and this is how
we’re going to do it. Here are the steps and this is how it affects you. It really streamlines the way I communicate and the way I put things forward to whoever my audience is at the time.”

“We’ve definitely adopted data. Everybody is now utilizing a lot more data. I think we’re embedded in it. That’s really nice to see. Now it’s the tweaking or making sure that how we collect the data can produce what we’re asking. That’s next level, which is fun.”

“And we’re really getting better with data and stronger there and using that to make decisions. I feel like we usually just kind of muddle around and try to find a way but nothing that’s really strategic or science based. Kind of like, I have a good idea. Let’s see how to implement it.”

“It [the LSS workshop] just taught me to look for data.”

“It's always finding ways to pin it and find that solution, but that isn't the lead way. The solution is not the first answer. That's the end result of all of the work leading up to it. So I love the concept of that. We’re not looking for the solution now, and I love that it’s admirable in all industries and all departments in all ways, and the versatility of how it can improve any organization, any business, even your personal life. I think the versatility is just mindful.”

“Be patient with yourself. I think it proves a lot of theories and natural tendencies that we have as human means to make assumptions to get the right answer. So be patient, be collaborative.”

“I was one of those people and still am. We all are to a point that you believe what you think and I would come up with what I thought the problem was and
wouldn't listen to anyone else. This is the problem and this is how we're going to fix it. So it [LSS] has taught me to sit back a little and don't come to conclusions before you've collected data."

“So there's so much emphasis in this method and Lean Six Sigma about communication, essentially understanding something and communicating what that something is. That's probably one of the things that I like most is being systematic and being able to communicate where you're at.”

“Not having assumptions or being able to question the assumptions that you came in with, coming in with an open mind – I think that is something I want to make sure that's there. Lean Six Sigma definitely gave me a voice.”

“[I am] more confident in the outcome of these initiatives. I have all the tools necessary that I can fall back on and implementing some of these strategies to improve our processes. [I have] more confidence as far as being able to implement it.”

“When I put the historical data on a graph, that was helpful for them. I don't think they cared whether it was a histogram or whether it was a bar chart, they didn't care about that. They cared about seeing the data and they were impressed that I use different tools. Did that help me so much? It didn't, but that was impressive to them and that professionalized me. So I think that's important. The fact that now I would be comfortable using those tools and having that vernacular.”

In one case, the participant claimed that they were getting the same outcomes as from using the tools just by focusing on the problem and that an official use of the tools was not necessary. “I think people just intuitively do that beginning stuff without the charts. It's weird. I think the stuff is happening, it's just not happening as part of the
official process.”

The use of the concepts are evidenced by the following quotes:

“Putting out this stuff is just more of a different format. We don’t do it in the same way. But concepts are there and it is helpful…it’s more about the concepts.”

“We are not good at using any of the tools but shift into [being] data driven, asking those questions first, and trying to get that information to start testing something to see if it works… figuring out what the baseline is to move from there. So a little shift in that has been through concepts.”

The discussion around concepts and tools can be summed up by stating that the participants found both the tools and concepts useful overall. The participants described their post-graduation experiences differently. Some admitted that they do not use the tools, but should they need them, they can refer back to their textbook or project as a refresher. Others explained that they use the tools, however, not systematically. Most participants claimed to carry the concepts with them as they approach how to address the problem and solutions.

4-2 Profits are Important

Discussion around profits and financial stability took place in all three rounds of interviews. In rounds 1 and 3, the participants commented on how they feel pressured to balance between profits and mission but understand that profits are vital to mission accomplishment. In round 2, the participants discussed how they believed LSS can lead to profits and financial stability which adds importance to integrating the methodology in their organization as well as sector wide.

The desire for financial stability was discussed throughout all three rounds of
interviews and are evidenced by the following:

“I believe incorporating the Lean Six Sigma method and a lot of things that we do will only help us and strengthen us moving forward so we’re sustainable and scalable as we grow.”

“I think it [Lean Six Sigma] fits well with nonprofits overall because we are mostly running pretty thin. We need to be able to do a lot more with a lot less. This program helps us do that. This methodology helps us do that.”

“Nonprofits need to make money too, so we can sustain ourselves.”

“I think people talk about nonprofits as people who have a mission. They don't realize that you need to make a profit to be sustainable.”

“I think the folks on the support services business type of organization understand the value of processes like Six Sigma and why profitability or at least staying in the black is so important.”

“Money is an important one. But really what matters is does it streamline the process?”

“At the end of the day, it's still a business.”

“…nonprofits still have to be sustainable, which means they still have to work efficiently. If you're not working efficiently, you're wasting money.”
All of the participants agreed that it was important for their organizations to act as a business so they can continue to deliver services which means they must pay attention to profitability. Most of the participants found value in LSS because they found it to be a strategy that could lead to stability and sustainability, which was what they desired for their organization.

4-3 Critical Success Factors

Critical Success Factors (CSFs) in Lean Six Sigma are those elements that are vital to the successful adoption of the methodology into the nonprofit organization. While many CSFs were mentioned throughout all three rounds of interviews, there were two that emerged most frequently. Leadership support and widespread knowledge were the two CSFs that participants found to be crucial to sustaining LSS in their nonprofits. Participants prescribed that based on their experiences, leadership support and widespread knowledge were needed for successful implementation and sustainability.

Leadership Support is Vital

Throughout all three rounds of interviews, the topic of leadership was a consistent thread. The participants strongly posited that leadership support, buy-in, and content knowledge were essential to being able to deploy LSS in their nonprofit. The participants acknowledged that a substantial amount of change would be needed to adopt LSS and this required leadership support and buy-in to lead the way.

"[Leaders] have to come and sell it to the rest of the company, to the rest of the staff, because if they [the staff] don't believe in it, it's not going to work. If you don't have the buy-in within a week or two, they go back to their old ways."
“I feel like the leaders kind of set the tone. If they don't believe in or understand
Six Sigma, then it doesn't work.”

“I think they [senior leadership] play a very big role. Enabling their team to do it
because it takes time, it takes bandwidth, it takes a little bit of finances, it takes
encouragement and support. If they don't have the capacity or the assets and
resources to do it, the senior leadership are the ones who really depict that. So
without their buy-in, and without their support, whether that’s the mental,
physical, emotional, financial, it doesn't happen. I think that's the truth, really.”

It is interesting to note that much of the academic literature surrounding CSFs of
LSS implementation in organizations confirms that leadership is eminent for
sustainability (Laureani & Antony, 2017a; Laureani & Antony, 2017b; Pamfilie, et al.,
2012; Laureani & Antony, 2012; Achanga, et al., 2006; El-Amin, 2016). Leadership is a
critical success factor for sustainability of LSS in organizations was found to be a theme
in this study and also aligns with the literature.

**Widespread Knowledge is Vital**

The participants discussed Critical Success Factors throughout the three rounds
of interviews, specifically the need for widespread knowledge of LSS throughout the
organization for successful adoption. The more people know and understand what LSS
is, the more likely it is to foster collaboration and buy-in throughout the enterprise. With
increased buy-in, change and adoption of LSS is likely to be sustained. Many of the
participants discussed not only the importance of widespread knowledge and buy-in, but
they also suggested ways on how to achieve buy-in.

“I feel like if they [leadership] experienced what we went through, they would
have a bigger understanding on how to tackle the everyday little task in the
minutia of it all. I would love for them to go through it and just apply it to their own department, apply it to their own practice. Even if it's not something that they want to use, they get their minds moving a little bit to improve whatever they want to improve.”

“They [leadership] need to be more involved in making data-driven structured decisions. That's where I think our stuff falls apart. What we think are good ideas, we don't necessarily do enough of preventing to make sure it was the right idea to implement. Even if it is a good idea, I don't think we do a really good enough job of making sure that we're communicating properly to staff when we're rolling it out. That was a big learning for us, we really have to be more careful. We have to not assume what people know. Lean Six Sigma helps us to uncover what people don't know.”

“You have to get everyone who's a decision maker to buy into it, because one of those people is likely going to be handed the process or the control. That's the part that is my biggest worry, or stress.”

“A lot of them [staff] didn't know what we were talking about. Simplifying it and doing small projects to show them this is what we do and this is how you can implement it.”

“The more we educate, the more we teach them or we show them these tools – not going through the full process – but knowing that it's there and available when they have a project or something they want to do.”
“I do agree that there's this education, it's not like everything is streamlined and smooth.”

Conclusions

In summary, the themes that arose from the multiple interviews and focus groups demonstrated the shared experiences of nonprofit leaders as they faced sector-bending on the frontlines. Their experiences, mostly positive, demonstrated that Lean Six Sigma brought value to their professional practice and nonprofit organizations. These nonprofit leaders reflected on their challenges with implementation and sustainability which centered around garnering buy-in from leadership, peers, and stakeholders which takes from already limited time and resources. All the nonprofit leaders in this study agreed that financial stability is vital to their existence, but they also acknowledged this may conflict with being mission driven. They strongly agreed that pursuing Lean Six Sigma as a means to financial stability was beneficial to the nonprofit. Lastly, these nonprofit leaders agreed that pursuing data as a strategy for informing decision making is important to adopt into operations and, eventually, the culture.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In 2019, I started as an administrator of the workshop (then titled), “Achieve Greater Social Impact Through Lean Six Sigma”. During the workshop, I observed resistance, hesitation, and skepticism by some nonprofit practitioners during the workshop classes that made me question offering the workshop and curriculum specifically to nonprofits. It made me question the unintended repercussions of teaching LSS to nonprofits with the implied promise that it will help them to increase social impact. I questioned the research behind the offering, and I even questioned whether I should be a part of the workshop offering. However, I also witnessed some practitioners fully embrace the methodology and complete stellar projects leading to improved processes and significant cost savings to the organization and proud, happy nonprofit leaders.

This experience led me to turn to the literature on sector-bending (Dees & Anderson, 2003) and businesslike practices (Maier, Meyer, & Steinbrech, 2016) for answers and developed a research study asking how nonprofit leaders make sense of these experiences. The study was grounded in trust that had been built during the workshop since I had been involved with each workshop offered since 2019, attended the classes, even working closely with some of the participants on their specific projects.

This concluding chapter discusses the findings and recommendations. I will elaborate on what parts of the workshop were perceived as most common shared experiences and about the changed attitudes and behaviors resulting from workshop participation. This section also expands on the specific take-aways reported by participants. The following sections suggest recommendations for practitioners and nonprofit leadership, respectively. The final section explains possible directions for future research.
Key Responses from Workshop Participants

Root Cause Analysis is Useful for Nonprofit Leaders

Learnings and outcomes from the workshop were a consistent theme throughout all three rounds of interviews. The participants were taught 15 tools and were asked to apply each tool to their project. A majority of the tools taught were part of the Analyze phase of the DMAIC and included the Root Cause Analysis (RCA) tools. Completing an RCA exercise increases the chances of identifying the true root cause of the problem you are trying to solve (George, Rowlands, Price & Maxey, 2005). The RCA tools that were taught were the Five Whys and the Fishbone Diagram. According to Theme 1-2 Learning and Outcomes, the evaluation of tools reveal that the Root Cause Analysis (RCA) tools were mentioned by seven of the ten participants as being useful. I attribute the usefulness of the set of RCA tools to the universal nature of the tools, that is, they can be used to get to the root cause regardless of the type of problem or business sector. For example, RCA tools are different from the tools that are time-focused or financially-focused. The RCA tools are focused on finding the source of the problem regardless of if they are financial or process focused. It was also mentioned by just one participant that the RCA tools take the focus away from having to confront an individual who is part of the problem, making it easier to address the problem and get to solutions. Additionally, the RCA is a universal tool that transcends different types of industries, businesses, and classifications.

Since there was much discussion around the fit of the tools throughout the rounds of interviews, it was important to identify the tools that were perceived as the best fit and why. The Root Cause Analysis tool was mentioned as the most useful which leads to the follow up question of why were the other tools less useful? To answer this, it
is also important to make a distinction about the fit of the tools and the methodology that is discussed in the following section.

The Perceived Lack of Fit is Not with Lean Six Sigma, it is with the Tools

Through my observations, I was particularly interested in why some of the nonprofit participants found difficulty in embracing the methodology and were resistant to applying it in their nonprofit. They explained that the differences between for-profit manufacturing and social services in nonprofits was a barrier to learning and applying the LSS methodology. They explained that nonprofits deal with “human emotion,” are people-centered, and are not concerned with money and profits like the for-profit manufacturing industry, which they perceived to be the philosophy behind LSS. This, according to some of the workshop participants, made Lean Six Sigma an ill-fitting or an inappropriate methodology for nonprofits. In fact, during one of the workshops, a participant described his experience learning the LSS concepts as “taking a lot of brainpower” to make the transition from manufacturing to nonprofit. At the conclusion of the workshop, he reflected, “There was a lot of mental work doing the translation for what does this mean for human service organizations? We’re not talking about planes, we’re talking about managers and people with long complex histories” (Pilot Study, LEAD 608). This points to the perception that was mentioned several times during my observations that LSS is not a fitting practice because it conflicts with being mission-driven. This, however, conflicts with Theme 3-3 Lean leads to profits which are important to nonprofit leaders. In fact, there were multiple times when the participants stated that nonprofits are businesses, and they must be profitable in order to continue the mission. Therefore, there is an explanation for this contradiction that is found between Theme 3-1 The Lean Six Sigma tools are useful in nonprofits when they are applicable (i.e. LSS does not fit in nonprofits) and Theme 4-2 Profits are important. That is, an explanation of
contraction observed with the different cohorts was that they were confusing the fit of the methodology with the fit of the tools. There was lots of continued discussion around the applicability and rating of the tools which many were found to not be a good fit and not useful. It became clear that several of the tools were not applicable to the participants' projects, which is likely what led them to the misconception that LSS, in its entirety, was not a fit for nonprofits. Therefore, the debate is not whether LSS fits into nonprofit practices, but what tool is the best fit for the LSS problem needing to be solved. One participant pointed out that there are other methodologies that exist to solve certain types of problems better than LSS. In that case, nonprofit leaders are encouraged to find the best methodology for their precise problem. It is shortsighted to perceive LSS as irrelevant to nonprofits as it is relative to the problem at hand.

Nonprofit Leaders Identify More with Lean and Less with Six Sigma

The nonprofit leaders in this study expressed a desire to implement an LSS culture in their organizations because they believe LSS can have a positive impact. This is further supported by Theme 1-1 Motivations, Theme 3-4 Nonprofit leaders want Lean Six Sigma to be sustainable in the organization, and Theme 2-2 This work is important to the sector and mission. As stated in Chapter 4, all participants found value in learning LSS and most expressed the desire to continue the work and even to pursue further certification. The participants were vocal that LSS provided them the opportunity to do more with less and improve their financial stability. This was contradictory to my observations where some workshop students expressed resistance, hesitation, and skepticism towards learning and applying LSS. An explanation for this contraction may be found in the differences between Lean and Six Sigma. Lean and Six Sigma are two separate methodologies. Lean focuses on eliminating waste and redundancies, allowing for organizations to maintain or increase outputs with limited resources. Lean focuses on
removing inefficiencies that typically reduce costs. Six Sigma is a data-driven methodology that focuses on decreasing variability and human error (Snee, 1999). Six Sigma uses data typically presented in graphs that are analyzed to make decisions relying mostly on quantitative information. I argue that nonprofit leaders identify more easily and readily with the Lean methodology because operating with limited resources is a familiar practice. Most nonprofit organizations are familiar with running lean, that is, being very careful of how money is spent on operations. It is common for nonprofit leaders to be tasked with spending less but producing more. In a different manner, operating under Six Sigma’s data-driven practices that focuses on processes and not so much on the people-factor is a different approach for most nonprofit leaders, making it a more challenging methodology to adopt. Using a Six Sigma method means using quantitative data to guide decisions over experience or feeling. While Six Sigma’s foundational principles pay attention to the humanistic side of change management and growth, the technical tools of LSS do not focus on it as much but use data and statistics to make logical conclusions. Some tools practice asking probing questions to garner even more data to make decisions. The nonprofit leaders in this study seemed to show an easier adoption of Lean practices over Six Sigma practices. That is, most nonprofit leaders expressed that analyzing data in a systematic way is something that they would like to do but have not fully embraced.

Nonprofit Leaders Accept that Lean Six Sigma Can Help Them be Sustainable

There is a debate in the nonprofit literature surrounding sector-bending. Some authors warn that classic nonprofits should beware of businesslike practices due to possible mission drift and loss of altruism (Bush, 1992; Eisenberg, 1997; Weisbrod, 1986; and Sanders, 2012). However, other scholars posit that adopting businesslike practices can improve the nonprofit’s organizational performance and, eventually, lead to
greater social impact. After conducting this study, the 10 nonprofit leaders from this study identified with the academic literature that posited a positive position on sector-bending. That is, the nonprofit leaders all stated that in the end, learning and applying LSS in their organization was a positive experience and beneficial to the organization. While there were mixed experiences about the alignment of LSS in their mission driven work, the nonprofit leaders agreed that LSS, as a businesslike practice, has the potential to lead to organizational effectiveness, particularly financial stability. Throughout the three rounds of interviews, a majority of the participants repeated that profits were important to their organizations because they sustain program delivery. The participants demonstrated an agreement that profits are what allow the organization to deliver the services that are needed in the community and for mission achievement. Therefore, contrary to the sector-bending literature that warns against the implementation of businesslike practices in nonprofits, the participants in this study demonstrated the need and advocacy by nonprofit leaders for profit generation despite being a nonprofit organization.

**Changed Attitudes and Behaviors of Nonprofit Leaders**

In this study, the Lean Six Sigma workshop was taught for seven semesters to 15 organizations and 60 nonprofit leaders. The training focused on teaching the technical skills of how to use the various LSS tools to complete an applied process improvement project that would have a cost savings impact on the nonprofit. At least 15 tools were taught and participants were asked to complete benchmark assignments using the tools. There was much emphasis placed on learning the tools and the outcomes associated with their use as this is typical of any training, particularly in teaching and certification of LSS. However, in addition to teaching the tools, there were
also foundational LSS principles that were explicitly and inexplicitly taught. LSS is based on a set of business principles (The origins of Lean Six Sigma | CQI | IRCA). They are:

1. Focus on the customer.
2. Identify and understand how the work gets done.
3. Manage, improve and smooth the process flow.
4. Remove non-value-added steps and waste.
5. Manage by fact and reduce variation.
6. Involve and equip people in the process.
7. Undertake improvement activity in a systematic way.

Using these principles as a framework for analyzing the themes, there is an especially important finding around the LSS concepts that were learned in the training. The concepts that the participants discussed overlap with some of the LSS principles listed above. The concepts that the participants mentioned in the first round of interviews and reinforced throughout the preceding interviews were:

Don't jump to solutions
Be patient and calm
Collect the data
Identify the problem by listening to others
Lean Six Sigma gave me a voice

These concepts were reinforced in the second and third round of interviews where the participants confirmed that the concepts were valuable learning. At least one participant described the concepts as her “number one takeaway” over the tools. The
participants explained that the LSS concepts changed their perceptions and behaviors, particularly in their approaches to leadership, problem solving, and interacting with others. In this study, LSS training changed the behaviors and leadership styles of these 10 nonprofit leaders. These changes in behaviors and approaches have proven to stick with the nonprofit leaders longer than the technical training of how to use the tools to improve a process.

Don’t Jump to Solutions and Be Patient and Calm

The concepts of not jumping to solutions, being patient and calm, and collecting the data are embedded in the LSS principles of identifying how the work gets done and managing by fact. These concepts and principles require that the nonprofit leader take their time to define the problem and collect data. They stress the importance of taking time to understand the entirety of the problem within a system and to analyze data, which are the facts. These are also the steps in the process that are controlled by the nonprofit leader and do not necessarily require collaboration or involve others. The participants recounted that these learnings have since changed their personal approach to projects and some claimed that they had an effect at the organizational level. Compared to the usefulness of the tools, the concept of not moving to solutions without a thorough understanding of the problem and the process is a principle that most of the participants continue to practice.

Identify the Problem by Listening to Others

The concept of identifying the problem by listening to others resonates with the LSS principle of involving people in the process. The participants spoke at length about the need for buy-in from others as well as the challenges of fostering buy-in. The buy-in and support from others, whether leaders or staff, is also found in the LSS principles
because involving others is a way to foster the much-needed support to make enterprise-wide process improvements successful. The participants recounted their experience with implementing LSS into their organization and stated that listening to others to clarify the problem was an important step in the LSS process. This demonstrated that fostering support for implementation is vital, requiring the leaders to adopt a new approach when communicating or interacting with others that involves listening and inclusion.

Lean Six Sigma Gave Me a Voice

The concept that is labeled Lean Six Sigma gave me a voice is about how the participants felt post-certification and after learning the LSS content. Participants felt that they had the language, position, and the confidence to speak to others in their organization about improving processes in which they may be involved. Again, this resonates with the LSS principle of involving people in the process and identifying how the work gets done. This was confirmed by the participants' experiences where they expressed confidence in sharing the data with senior leadership and boards to help other leaders and stakeholders make better informed decisions. The participants shared stories of how their personal communication skills were strengthened, making themselves more versatile to speak to different audiences resulting in moving their LSS projects forward.

The Outcome is the Change in Attitudes and Behaviors

Exposure to these concepts and principles have reshaped the way the nonprofit leaders in this study approach their work. The participants described that they have experienced a mind shift when approaching a project as well as an overall change in the way they practice. As stated earlier, the participants believe that LSS is beneficial to their
organization, and they also confirmed that LSS has benefitted their personal practice, behaviors, and perceptions. This is important to both the literature and to practice which is further discussed in the next sections. A final recommendation to practitioners, stakeholders, instructors, and funders is to understand that the learning changes the nonprofit leaders. While the nonprofit leaders may not go on to execute further Green Belt projects as a regular part of their practice, the concepts they learned from the workshop have proven to stay with them. Even though many of the nonprofit leaders had challenges recalling specific LSS tools, they were able to recall the concepts that resonated with them the most, such as not jumping to solutions and taking the time to create buy-in from leaders and staff. There is the possibility that nonprofit leaders may never utilize a LSS tool for the remainder of their careers, however, the participants in this study all showed that the learnings changed their approach to practice and leadership. This should be especially helpful for instructors and funders to understand to manage their expectations of teaching LSS to nonprofit leaders as well as the outcomes to the organization.

**Implications to the Field of Nonprofit Studies**

The nonprofit leaders’ experiences in sector-bending demonstrated what is happening on the frontlines, which can serve to inform the broader field of nonprofit studies, with some limitations. This study’s findings acknowledge that there were tensions experienced by some of the nonprofit leaders as they engaged in sector-bending. The tension refers to the grappling some of the nonprofit leaders felt as they wished to maintain a balance of being both mission and profit-driven simultaneously. They also wanted to be both altruistic and data driven at the same time. The literature suggests that these are conflicting values and urges nonprofits to maintain their collaborative and organic values by warning against adopting businesslike activities.
However, the discipline that the nonprofit leaders expressed by breaking out of traditional nonprofit professional development and learning a manufacturing-centered methodology, gave them a new perspective that they would not have otherwise received. Adventuring outside of nonprofit training proved to challenge many of the beliefs, assumptions, and practices of the nonprofit leaders. The sector-bending tension they experienced provoked personal growth and improved leadership skills.

This study makes an innovative contribution to the sparse literature and research on Lean Six Sigma in nonprofits by examining leader experiences. These contributions include an in-depth qualitative analysis of the lived experiences of nonprofit leaders engaging in sector-bending. Findings indicated a change in behavior and leadership approach after LSS training was reported. This study also provided additional empirical evidence that leadership is key to a successful implementation and adoption of a LSS culture in a nonprofit. This confirms other studies that also claim leadership is important to LSS deployment, this time by using a qualitative methodology and focused on US nonprofits. Lastly, this study offers evidence that disputes the perception that LSS does not fit in the nonprofit context and that it conflicts with nonprofit values. While taking the workshop, many of participants expressed trouble applying the tools to their projects because they were not relevant. This was confused with the actual LSS methodology being irrelevant to nonprofit organizations. However, it was not that the LSS methodology conflicted with nonprofits, instead, it was that some LSS tools did not match the problem. These were some of the main contributions of this study that have added to the current nonprofit literature and sector.
Recommendations to Practitioners

The Nonprofit Context

The workshop is not the only one of its kind being marketed as an innovative solution to helping nonprofits grow capacities and increase social impact. A quick Google and LinkedIn search reveals many options for nonprofits to learn how to use LSS to improve social impact. Sector-bending and businesslike practices are here to stay. By better understanding the participants’ perspectives and how they attempted to integrate such new learning into their organization, we are positioned to make evidence-based recommendations to nonprofit practitioners. If we know the experiences of nonprofit leaders as they journey through the completion of the LSS program, we can make better recommendations to practitioners, leaders, board members, funders, universities, consultants, and for-profit businesses. The following sections describe the aspects of LSS that can be manipulated to better address the unique needs of nonprofits.

Use Nonprofit Examples, Master How to Identify a Process, Choose a Fitting Project

During the interviews and focus groups, the nonprofit context was consistently mentioned. The participants were mindful of working in a mission-driven organization. They demonstrated an understanding of the role and reputation nonprofits have in the public eye. At times, they used their nonprofit status as an explanation of the discomfort they felt while learning certain tools such as value stream mapping. The participants often countered that their organization does not make widgets but provides services and they were confused how to use the learning in their projects and organization. To mitigate the resistance, the professor of the workshop began using nonprofit examples, which was helpful. In fact, I recommend any practitioner learning or teaching LSS to
nonprofits use an abundance of nonprofit examples. More importantly, it is vital that the students understand that even if you do not make widgets, you still engage in a process. Even with delivery of services, a process must take place to accomplish that delivery. It is the process that LSS is interested in, and this was found to be extremely challenging for many of the practitioners to identify and single out the detailed steps of a process. I argue that the difficulty leaders have with identifying a process and working with the myopic details that LSS requires may stem from their positions as high-level strategic leaders. The higher the level, the less direct contact you have with the processes of the frontline workers, making project selection difficult for executives. Therefore, it takes training, or retraining, of nonprofit executives on the detail that LSS is about small, incremental process improvement, and not strategic organization-wide change. I believe that thinking myopically is not something executives do daily nor expected to do, and this poses a challenge for executives, especially in large nonprofits. However, this study found that leadership should be trained or at least be familiar with LSS for successful implementation to take place. Therefore, it is important that the executive suite be certified, trained, or become familiar with the LSS methodology to increase the chances of successful implementation.

**Project Selection**

The challenge of getting nonprofit leaders to think myopically adds to the difficulty for nonprofit leaders in choosing a project. Choosing a project is instrumental to a successful experience and application. Although careful measures were taken by the professor to guide project selection, there were still participants who regretted their project selection. The highest performing projects (see Table 2) were those that examined repeatable processes where data could be collected, and solutions could be piloted. The highest performing projects also had financial impact, mostly in terms of
cost savings (lean). These projects were rated highly by the LSS workshop instructor and were completed by Children’s Hope (Genevieve and Cynthia), Taylor Health Care (Anne and Jazmine), and Mother’s Clinic (Maria). The project completed by Children’s Hope was to decrease the onboarding time for volunteers which successfully created new procedures that decreased the time from 217 days to 90 days. This allowed volunteers to be cleared faster so that they can start working with youth, allowing for increased program and service delivery. The project completed by Taylor Health Care was to improve the intake process of patients. One of the successes of the project decreased the time it took to process intake forms which resulted in a significant decrease. This was found to improve the experience for the family and initiate the billing and reimbursement process sooner which is beneficial for the organization’s finances. Mother’s Clinic also had a highly ranked project that improved the medication ordering procedure which resulted in diverting $39,000 away from administrative work to direct patient care. This added 832 hours to direct patient care, which increased program delivery. These projects were successfully completed because they included repeatable processes where data were captured and analyzed. Solutions were piloted and new procedures were implemented that turned out to be financially beneficial to the organization and improved quality of service delivery. Therefore, it is highly recommended that students and instructors take careful consideration when choosing a project, paying close attention to whether the process to improve is repeatable, able to collect data, and one where solutions can be piloted. A well-chosen project will set a positive tone for future LSS projects and using relevant tools aligned with that project do the same.

Final recommendations to practitioners, stakeholders, and consultants are the following:

1. Use numerous nonprofit examples
2. Guide practitioners’ understanding of small incremental change and identifying workflow processes, explaining that this is different than strategic, organization-wide change.

3. Choose a well-rounded, repeatable, measurable project from which data can be collected and analyzed, solutions can be piloted, and has financial implications to the organization (whether it is cost savings or revenue generation).

**Leadership Recommendations**

A combination of the literature, interviews, and observations reveal that leadership and buy-in is vital to successful implementation of LSS in nonprofits. Such a collaborative business practice calls for a collaborative approach to leadership such as action inquiry. Action inquiry is “a way of simultaneously conducting action and inquiry as a disciplined leadership practice that increases the wider effectiveness of our actions” (Tolbert, et al., p. 1, 2004). Action inquiry works at the individual, team, and organizational levels and “still larger institutions become more capable of self-transformation and thus more creative, more aware, more just, and more sustainable” (Tolbert, et al., p. 1, 2004).

Action inquiry and action-logics put forth by Torbert is a compatible leadership model for teaching LSS because it prescribes how individuals should behave to generate organizational change. It is a theory and model where individuals create their identity through an organizational lens. For example, the action-logics are characterized by their performance within an organization and in teams (e.g. The Strategist is one who generates organizational transformation). A complete description of Action Inquiry is found in Appendix K.

I found the Action-logics typology to be a good descriptor of the participants from this study in that most of them described themselves through the lens of the
organization. They each expressed a deep desire in doing their part to make the organization a better run business. Their motives (Theme 1-1) indicated that they had a desire to learn a new skill set to make their organization more efficient and financially stable. At no point did any of the participants exhibit an Opportunist point-of-view. In fact, Scott stated that he wanted to make sure the company got their ROI for paying for the class, a demonstration of putting the organization above self. And although the participants used diplomatic means to generate buy-in and cooperation from their leaders and colleagues to complete their projects, I argue that does not place them in the Diplomat category. Their purpose for wanting to create change is opposite of the Diplomat who does not want to create any conflict. I believe that most of the participants seemed to fall into the Expert, Achiever, and Individualist action-logic based on the way they described their motivations and their desire for their organization to succeed and create more social impact. The reason why I would not put them into the Strategist category is because most of them admitted to struggling to make LSS a part of the culture. They have not been able to move their departments or organizations from status quo to working like a data-driven LSS organization. Torbet’s Strategist action-logic matches closely with Laureani’s (2018) description that Lean Six Sigma is an effective leadership development tool that enables leaders to move their organization from one paradigm to another; from one way of working to another way of working (Snee, 2010 as cited in Laureani, 2018). Since the participants have not yet been able to use LSS to make organizational change indicates that they have not reached the Strategist action-logic when it comes to enterprise-wide adoption of LSS. I argue that the participants in this study have not reached a Strategist action-logic concerning LSS in their organization since LSS requires moving their nonprofit organization to focus on data, efficiencies, process, and quality, which participants stated is their goal, but remains a challenge.
Implications for Future Research

This study focused on participants using an open call for recruitment. Future research should systematically establish hypotheses regarding LLS outcomes and recruit participants based on expected variation in responses. For example, this study’s participants worked for large nonprofits and future research can compare samples of participants across size, sector, and other criteria. This will allow for a better understanding of sector-bending experiences and how LSS resonates across a diverse nonprofit sector.

This study could be repeated with nonprofits with budgets less than $5 million and findings can be compared. Furthermore, the study should be expanded to include nonprofits outside of the San Diego region. Since less than 10% of nonprofits have budgets of over $5 million, this sample was not very representative of the average, classic nonprofit in San Diego and the US since they all had budgets of $10 million or more. Furthermore, since this workshop and most LSS trainings are conducted virtually, it is possible to invite nonprofits from different regions and states to be part of future studies. Lastly, three of the nonprofits in this sample were from the health care industry. They represented primary care, hospice care, and mental health which are different types of health care, but all part of the larger category of health. This study could be expanded to include more diverse industries, especially since the diversity of nonprofit specialties are one of the unique characteristics (Boris & Steuerle, 2006).

Another way to build on this research is to connect social impact as an outcome of LSS adoption. This can be beneficial to the nonprofit as it would be of interest to potential funders and stakeholders. Future research can hypothesize that there is a beneficial link between the use and adoption of LSS to an increase in outputs and outcomes.
Workshop Recommendations

Many adjustments have been made to the workshop and its curriculum delivery since its inaugural cohort of 2019. As each cohort graduated, the stories and experiences left behind became the new nonprofit examples for future cohorts. The nonprofit examples were important to the teaching of the tools because they increased the trust and understanding of the nonprofit participants. Using nonprofit examples was also something mentioned by the study participants as a welcomed tool for supporting the teaching of the technical content.

It is important to manage expectations when delivering this workshop and making reasonable decisions on what outcomes to measure based on the findings of this study and the pilot study. Both studies found that there was not much use of the LSS tools themselves post-graduation and, at the conclusion of this study, there have not been any additional Green Belt projects that were completed independently. Instead, it is recommended to approach outcomes of this workshop as a leadership development tool. This is especially important to consider if the workshop is funded with donor funds as was the case in this workshop (for the first three cohorts). Managing the expectations of private donors and funders will increase the likelihood of continued support of the program should the donors have other ideas. Measuring the growth in leadership development after the LSS training is a more realistic expectation over the expectation that a formalized LSS program would ensue at the nonprofit after graduation. The participants in this study, even representing organizations over $10 million, explained that they do not have enough resources and staff to carry on the LSS work. In fact, clarifying these expectations to the students themselves would also be highly recommended to promote a transparent environment for learning. Therefore, measuring
leadership development and change in behaviors and approaches is a better and manageable expectation.

Another recommendation is to focus the curriculum so that it is a little more explicit about teaching the concepts. The workshop’s framework is around the DMAIC which is typical for LSS training classes. Less taught in this workshop were the Lean principles and the Six Sigma foundational principles and history and at least one study participant recommended more time being spent on the history and impact of LSS. Reviewing the background of Lean and Six Sigma could help nonprofit leaders make the connection between the methodology and their role as a leader in process improvement and change management. It may also help the nonprofit leaders understand how vital their personal leadership is to the success of the project and the implementation of a LSS culture and approach to operations. In addition to the didactic teaching of the framework and tools, time could be spent on discussing some of the foundational principles. For example, creating a unit on understanding how the work gets done (i.e. this study’s finding: don’t jump to solutions) or involve and equip people in the process (i.e. this study’s finding: LSS takes buy-in). These were some of the concepts that resonated with the participants in this study, and these could be concepts that are explicitly taught and discussed as critical success factors for LSS integration in their organization.

It is worth mentioning a key finding that was found to be a critical success factor in this study in which participants explained that what is needed is somewhat of an understanding of what LSS is at the leadership level as well as enterprise-wide understanding of the methodology. One participant mentioned that a short primer should be written to help with delivering an easy overview of LSS. Another participant encouraged leadership to enroll in at least part of the workshop to gain a better
understanding to properly support the employees who are doing the work. To provide the support that the participants need once they return to their organization as Green Belts, the workshop should consider engaging senior leadership in the learning process, possibly as a condition of enrollment. Currently, senior champions must give written authorization to their employees to take the workshop, this is to ensure buy-in, and the senior leaders are invited to the last day report out of the final projects. This recommendation is to extend the workshop’s teaching to the senior leaders to position the Green Belts for future success. The more resources the Green Belts have upon returning to their organizations, the more likely they are to carry on the technical and leadership work it takes to implement LSS successfully.

Lastly, I encourage administrators of all LSS courses taught to nonprofits to understand Tolbert’s Action Logics. Action Logics is a leadership approach that deals directly with organization-wide change which is what LSS needs to have long term sustainability in a nonprofit. Tolbert’s typology can serve as a lens on how to best deliver the teaching and how best to support student learning. Recommending this Situational Leadership-style approach is directed to the instructor and administrators. In conducting this study, I found that many of the participants attributed their personal success to the success of the organization and the more social impact the organization delivers, the more satisfied the participants seemed. Their motives and desires were to promote positive outcomes because of learning the LSS skills and using them in their workplace. Understanding this typology can aid the instructor in delivering the teaching, for example, by focusing on how the program will lift the team and result in better organizational performance. Tolbert’s Expert, Achiever, and Individualist action-logics respond to explanations that are focused on team and organization. Using Action Logics will also help predict where challenges and opportunities may exist with students so that
planning curriculum and discussion around such predictions will result in excellent workshop delivery.

Personal Reflection

I was a workshop participant in the second cohort in 2019. I participated as a student and completed an applied project in my nonprofit organization just like the ten participants in this study. I got to experience taking this workshop firsthand which allowed me to resonate and reflect on the implications of what this experience means to my personal approach to leadership and practice. I also had the opportunity to experience the phenomenon of sector-bending since I wanted to learn the LSS skills with the intention of building a LSS department in my nonprofit. I was awarded a Green Belt at the completion of the workshop which I proudly acknowledge with the initials LSSGB after my name whenever possible. It was an accomplishment I had been working towards for several years.

I was humbled to be part of this workshop and honored to be able to conduct this study alongside many selfless individuals who gave of their time for the betterment of research. Completing the workshop has equipped me with the technical skills to use and teach the LSS tools and possibly conduct future Green Belt projects. Like all ten participants, I have yet to complete a Green Belt project independently post-certification.

Upon completion of this study, I realized that my experiences are very much aligned with the experiences of the participants and the findings. In fact, one of the themes called “Don’t jump to solutions” was the one that resonated with me the most. As a nonprofit practitioner, I am often asked to change strategies to reach goals. It is tempting to jump to solutions without taking the time to understand the problem. I have already put this concept into practice in my professional and personal life and it has
been extremely useful. I can confirm the findings of my own study which state that LSS changes behaviors. I agree that learning LSS has changed my behavior, outlook and approach to problem solving and leadership. I not only have a better approach, I also have the tools to support this new approach which gives me confidence to continue building LSS in my daily practice.

While playing a part in the administration of the workshop and observing most of the sessions, I noticed a repeating cycle of the participants struggling to understand that LSS is about process improvement and every action that takes place in their nonprofit is tied to a process. It was often said by participants that they did not have a process or what they believed was a process was, in fact, a program. For each cohort, it has always been a challenge to explain that everything has a process and while it might not be a good one, it is still a process. In several instances, the discussion around how to define a process is often left unfinished so as not to belabor the point. Sometimes, the participants must act on a bit of faith so they can move on to the next step which is typically project selection. I have seen this discussion end with uneasiness from the nonprofit leaders, likely due to this being out of their normal range of duties. That said, I have also seen participants turn down projects because they wanted to make sure they had control over each step and did not want to take the time to involve others which is bypassing one of the main principles of LSS. This part of the workshop is always a reminder for me to check my leadership approach. While sometimes these discussions can be frustrating, I find that practicing Action Logics and situational leadership is often helpful. For example, listening to the participants, using relevant examples, and offering to meet offline is what I offer to guide the learning.

Lastly, going through the steps of this research study has helped me reshape how I define successful program delivery. At the time of the pilot study, I theorized that a
successful program would be measured by whether the participants could recall the learning from memory and whether they have since applied that learning. This thought carried over into this study, whereby I asked the participants to assess the tools and used the follow-up interview to dive deeper into the whys and why nots. Until then, the instructor and I were hopeful that the participants were using the tools and experiencing a thriving LSS culture in their workplace, especially for those who graduated four years earlier. And while assessing memory and application remains a standard way of measuring effectiveness, it became clear during this study that success and effectiveness could be defined in much broader, meaningful, and long-lasting terms.

When it became evident that the LSS concepts had more effect on the nonprofit leaders than the tools, it was apparent that LSS had a much deeper resonance within character than usage of the tools. As participants described the change in behavior and approach to practice and leadership because of LSS training, I realized this was instrumentally the first steps into defining success.
REFERENCES


Getchius, A. (2011). Improving the effectiveness of the Barnabas Ministry volunteer program at the Midwest Center for Health through the application of quality processes. [Masters Thesis, California State University Dominguez Hills]


Litalien, B. (2012). Towards a framework of the social franchise: A management construct for nonprofit leaders. [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Maryland University College]


https://doaj.org/article/966e6576c8174058a7c3ba9cb9f97b0a


APPENDIX B

Definition of Terms

*Sector-bending.* “A wide variety of approaches, activities, and relationships that are blurring the distinctions between nonprofit and for-profit organizations, either because they are behaving more similarly, operating in the same realms, or both” (Dees & Anderson, 2003, p.16).

*Nonprofit organizations.* U.S. nonprofit organizations are exempt from federal income taxes and are permitted to receive tax-deductible contributions from individuals and corporations (Boris & Steuerle, 2006).

*For-profit organizations.* Organizations that operate with goal of making profits (retrieved from the US Chamber of Commerce website at https://www.uschamber.com/co/start/strategy/nonprofit-vs-not-for-profit-vs-for-profit)

*Businesslike.* “Business-like activities are generally understood to be those characterized by some blend of profit motivation, the use of managerial and organization design tools developed in for-profit business settings, and broadly framed business thinking to structure and organize activity” (Dart, 2004, p. 294)

*Lean.* Lean is focused on solving problems that are caused by waste in a process.

*Six Sigma.* A data-driven approach to problem solving that is focused on quality improvement.

Operational excellence. The “ongoing efforts to establish an internal framework of standards and processes intended to engage and motivate employees to deliver products and services that fulfill customer requirements within business expectations” (ASQ.org, retrieved from https://asq.org/quality-resources/organizational-excellence#:~:text=Organizational%20excellence%20is%20defined%20as%20customer%20requirements%20within%20business%20expectations)

Organizational performance. A “story about the achievements of an organization” (Corvellec, 1997, p. 3)

Social impact. A measurement for “demonstrating results in addressing complex social problems such as poverty and inequality” (Ebrahim, 2014, p. 118).
**APPENDIX C**

Literature Reviewed Articles About LSS in Nonprofits

*Literature Review of Peer Reviewed Articles about Lean Six Sigma in Nonprofits/not-for-profits*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author, Year</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of the Lean Six Sigma framework in non-profit organisations: A case study</td>
<td>Cheng &amp; Chang, 2012</td>
<td>Journal article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting Lean Six Sigma for a Non-Profit Organization</td>
<td>DeLeon, 2016</td>
<td>Masters thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Sigma for Non-profit organizations</td>
<td>Fiddick, 2005</td>
<td>Masters thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Taxonomy Of Lean Six Sigma Success Factors For Service Organizations</td>
<td>Hajikordestani, 2010</td>
<td>Masters thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Growth: The Impact of Lean Six Sigma on Financial Performance for Nonprofits</td>
<td>Gray, 2021</td>
<td>Doctoral dissertation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving the effectiveness of the Barnabas Ministry volunteer program at the Midwest Center for Health through the application of</td>
<td>Getchius, 2011</td>
<td>Masters thesis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
quality processes

Big Theories in Small Places: Lean/Six Sigma in the Small to Medium Size Nonprofit – Can they work?  
Lochner, 2018  Doctoral dissertation

Applying Lean Six Sigma Methodology as a Nonprofit Organizational Development Tool  
El-Amin, 2016  Doctoral dissertation

Using Lean Six Sigma to Reduce Patient Cycle Time in a Nonprofit Community Clinic  
Kovach & Ingle, 2019  Journal article

?? #10? - Continuous improvement strategies for nonprofit organizations  
Mohammed, 2017  Doctoral dissertation
APPENDIX D

First Round Email Invitation

Hi Bob,

It's been a while and I hope this finds you well!

If you recall from the Lean Six Sigma workshop at USD, I am studying LSS in nonprofits and I am explicitly reaching out to see if you would be part of my doctoral research in "sector-bending". I think the outlook and experience you can offer would be valuable and I would be honored if you could find the time to chat about your post-experience.

As a graduate of the Lean Six Sigma for Social Impact workshop taught by Dr. Lenny Perry, I am hoping you’ve had a chance to reflect on your learning and I am anxiously awaiting to learn about your post-experience!

This is in no way an evaluation of you nor the workshop. I simply want to learn more about your personal experiences as a nonprofit leader post-Green Belt. There are no wrong or right answers... as a matter of fact, I will email you the questions ahead of time :) Even if you don't remember a thing, don't disqualify yourself - it's all great data to me!

I truly appreciate your consideration. Just imagine that your participation will live forever in academia and the countless nonprofit practitioners you would be helping!!

Let me know and I hope to hear from you soon.
APPENDIX E

Interview Guide

My research about sector-bending. Sector-bending is when nonprofits take on the characteristics of for-profit companies where it becomes hard to tell where one begins and the other ends. It is a blurring between sectors - and specifically, I am looking at what are the implications of when a nonprofit adopts businesslike practices in their operations. So, my research is taking a deep dive into your personal experience of learning and applying LSS in your nonprofit. It is not an evaluation of the workshop, more about your personal experiences with LSS that prompted you to attend

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1. What is your title and role at your organization?
2. Tell me about your professional background and the journey to your current role.

EXPERIENCE WITH LEAN SIX SIGMA IN THEIR NP

3. What prompted you to take the Lean Six Sigma for Nonprofits workshop?
4. Tell me a little about your LSS project that you completed as part of the workshop.
5. Any lessons learned after completing your project?
6. Overall, has LSS been useful in your job? Explain.
7. Have you since used any of the LSS tools that you learned as part of the workshop?
   (e.g. SIPOC, Value Stream Map, Root Cause Analysis, Cost-Benefit Analysis, Stratification Tree, 5S, TIMWOOD, Pareto chart, Data Collection Sheet, 5 Whys, Fishbone Diagram, Control Plan)

LEADERSHIP

8. What role do you think leadership plays in Lean Six Sigma?
9. Has Lean Six Sigma changed your personal leadership style? In what ways?
10. What leadership traits do you possess that align with the Lean Six Sigma methodology?

11. Conversely, do you have values that do NOT align with the LSS methodology?

12. What advice would you give to a nonprofit leader who wants to pursue a LSS green belt?
Dear Desiree,

I’m back!

Desiree, thank you so much for making time to allow me to pick your brain about Lean Six Sigma in the nonprofit sector. It’s taken much longer than I anticipated to round back with you for PART 2 (my apologies!) But I do appreciate you being willing to answer a few more questions which will allow me to finish collecting data and then to share my findings with all of you!

Should you need a refresher, I’m attaching the transcript from our first interview.

After completing 10 interviews, I’d like to share some of the emerging themes. As you review them, please think about which of these resonate with you. Are there themes that you feel strongly towards? Are there themes you would like to elaborate on or clarify? Is there anything missing from this list?

1. I want to help improve the organization by improving my skills.

2. I learned how to approach solutions slowly and carefully
   a. Not jumping to solutions
   b. Being patient/calm
   c. Collecting the data
   d. Listening to others about what the problems are
e. Understand the problem

f. Don’t blame the person

3. Lean Six Sigma gave me a voice
   a. A roadmap/framework that I’ve been missing
   b. To communicate with stakeholders
   c. A common language with leadership
   d. Gave me confidence
   e. A vernacular for departments and projects to share
   f. It neutralizes issues (e.g. personnel)
   g. LSS puts weight around it

4. The Green Belt Certification increased my investment into the organization

5. Lean Six Sigma is an odd fit, but I got value

6. Lean Six Sigma takes a tremendous amount of buy-in and collaboration for sustainability
   a. It is important for leaders to understand the LSS methodology in order to keep it going
   b. You must get those in charge on your side
   c. You must own the change
d. It takes a lot of time

e. Leaders set the tone

7. The nonprofit environment is uncertain

   a. There is a lot of change, but most don’t like change

   b. It is a challenge to balance being data driven and mission driven

   c. We don’t focus on profit

   d. We are collaborative

   e. We deal with human emotion

   f. Resources are limited

8. The following table has which LSS \textit{tools} were helpful and unhelpful (or both!)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Unhelpful</th>
<th>Most Challenging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value Stream Map</td>
<td>Value Stream Map</td>
<td>Project Charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Why's</td>
<td>Five Why's</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIPOC</td>
<td>SIPOC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5S</td>
<td>DOWNTIME</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Cause Analysis – Fish Bone</td>
<td>Solution Selection Matrix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMAIC</td>
<td>Quick Wins Grid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pareto Charts</td>
<td>Control Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Charter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Benefit Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratification Tree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Tool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMEA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, can we schedule a 30-minute Zoom session so I can hear your thoughts on this list? No need to provide any answers in writing, I will record and transcribe our conversation same as last time.

I APPRECIATE YOU!!!
APPENDIX G

Mind Mapping Illustration from First Round of Interviews

Figure F1. Mind map used for thematic analysis after first round of interviews.
APPENDIX H
Slide Deck Shown at Focus Group

Lean Six Sigma in Nonprofits

What are the frontline experiences of nonprofit leaders?

Round 1 Themes

1. I want to help the organization by improving my skills
2. I approach solutions slowly and carefully
3. LSS gave me a voice
4. The workshop increased my investment in the organization
5. LSS is an odd fit, but I got value
6. LSS takes a lot of buy-in and collaboration
7. The challenge with implementation is that the nonprofit environment is uncertain
8. In different contexts, the tools are helpful
Round 1 Themes

1. I want to help the organization by improving my skills
2. I approach solutions slowly and carefully
3. LSS gave me a voice
4. The workshop increased my investment in the organization
5. LSS is an odd fit, but I got value
6. LSS takes a lot of buy-in and collaboration
7. The challenge with implementation is that the nonprofit environment is uncertain
8. In the different contexts, the tools are helpful

Round 2 Themes

1. People (the people-factor is a challenge)
2. Growth (LSS benefits our mission; is important to the sector)
3. Concepts (concepts are helpful over the tools)
4. Tools (tools are helpful for the front line CI staff)
5. Data (being data-driven is important)
Theme #1 The People Factor

“...they [coworkers] can identify the problem. And then you explained to them the process of fixing it, and they’re like, Whoa, I don't want to do that. I just wanted to quickly fix it. It's like, okay, well, I can't just snap my fingers. There's a process.”

“It's really interesting how much opposition we've run into. We touched on this in the training, but I was surprised how protective and how protected people get when you ask to offer to help improve the system that they own, they get very sort of defensive.”

“But that was my biggest frustration was that people just kept sliding back into their own things, and leadership didn’t push them.”

“While you don't blame the person, sometimes there is a person that is part of the problem. So trying to work that out into not blaming the person but also addressing the issues that that person brings to the table that are not systemic problems. They're specifically one person problems because it does happen. So I think that's challenging as well. People are the problem people. Darn emotions.”

Theme #2 Growth - this work is important to the mission & sector

“... it’s just beautiful to continue to advocate on behalf of it because the majority of nonprofits in San Diego support the wellbeing of our community and the well being as our health of our community.”

“...nonprofits still have to be sustainable, which means they still have to work efficiently. If you're not working efficiently, you're wasting money.”

“Any one in leadership in a nonprofit, of course, has to ensure that the nonprofit is profitable. Yeah. Even if the revenue comes from government grants, or foundation grants, or donations, wherever it comes from the revenue needs to exceed the cost. Because if it doesn't, for long enough, that nonprofit will cease to exist. Now, I don't know in what way that contradicts being mission driven. at all. I mean, if anything, being profitable, supports the mission, because you don't have to layoff people, you have program continuity, all of the good things that come with sustainability.”
Theme #2 Growth - valuable to personal growth

Personal Growth

“I just feel like you become you become as a person more efficient. And I don't even know how to describe it better”

“I love the program. And it has helped me in so much of my work personally and professionally.”

Theme #3 Concepts

“So we're seeing pieces of it being used not systematically from A to Z, but pieces of it being utilized. And the language is is becoming a little more normal. It's not so foreign.”

“We don't do it in the same way. But concepts are there and it is helpful... it's more about the concepts. And so it's almost like I'm not talking about Lean Six Sigma as much with the day to day in the office. But more of just how I'm leading in my expectation, and like the planning and structure that goes along with it”

“So it's weird. I think the stuff is happening. It's just not happening as part of the official process. It doesn't feel textbook enough”
Theme #4 Tools

Most mentioned
Root Cause Analysis/Fishbone, Five Whys

Most mentioned as NOT helpful
Cost-benefit analysis

Theme #5 Data

“Everybody wants to bypass the analysis”

“...people are scared of data”

“you can have all the feel goods you want, and you can follow the mission, but you can’t sustain if you don’t have the data.”

“So getting people to actually collect the data, and when you’re listening to others about the problems and being able to somehow untangle or get them to let go of their preconceived notions about why that won’t work with the data. I think that’s where the real crux of it is”

Figure H1. Slide deck shown to focus groups 1 and 2.
APPENDIX I

Document Sources of Project Charters

Barney Health Improvement Project
Project Charter

Problem Statement:
Barney has experienced declining response rates in satisfaction survey participation as a result of the State’s shift from in-person to virtual data collection. This has significantly reduced Barney’s ability to gauge client satisfaction with services in several key areas, all of which drive the agency’s strategic initiatives.

Names have been deleted for anonymity

Performance Measures (Metrics)
- Survey results collected on a quarterly basis
- Real-time feedback from clients
- Employee satisfaction surveys

Project Charter

Stage: Satisfaction Survey Response Rate Improvement

Project Objective:
- Increase the percentage of clients who respond to the Satisfaction Survey from 60% to 80% over the next 12 months.

Schedule:
- Start Date: 3/1/20
- End Date: 3/31/21

What is wrong or not working?
Response rates have fallen, and data is difficult to obtain.

How do you measure current problem?
Barney tracks response rates and responses via Survey Monkey and tabulates/reports with Excel pivot tables.

When did the problem start?
In 2018, but it was exacerbated by COVID-19.

Where is the problem occurring?
At the point of data collection.

What is the impact on our organization?
The potential inability to improve services and the inability to achieve a strategic goal.
Project Charter: Potter School

Project Charter

Project Title: Increasing Alumni Donations at Events

Team Members
What are our names and the roles we have in the team?
- 
- 
- 
- 
- Names have been deleted for anonymity

Problem Statement:
Describes the “pain” caused by the current problem. What is wrong or not working?
How do we measure current problem?
When did the problem start?
Where is the problem occurring?
What is the impact on our organization?

Donors are inconsistently receiving communication without a clear philanthropic direction.

Project Objective:
- Improve some METRIC from some BASELINE to some GOAL, in some amount of TIME with some IMPACT against some corporate GOAL or OBJECTIVE.

Alumni giving at events will increase by 20%.

Scope:
The scope defines the boundaries of the project.

Scope In: All alumni outreach will be recorded.

Scope Out: Have all alumni been communicated with? Do we have the appropriate outreach? Email, events, phone calls?

Performance Measures (Metrics):
Measures current level of process performance and the impact on organizational performance.

Primary Metric:
- 
- 
- 
- Secondary Metric(s):
- 
- 
- 

Project Schedule:
Key Deliverables and Due Dates
- March 24: Value Stream Mapping
- March 31: Collecting the Right Data
- April 7: Baseline Phase
- April 14: Identifying Waste
- April 21: Data Analysis
- April 28: Root Cause of Problem Analysis
- May 12: SD
- May 19: ANALYSIS Phase
- May 26: Solutions
- June 2: Change
- June 9: Final Presentation

Project Charter

Children’s Hope

Project Name: Reducing volunteer onboarding timeline to become active volunteer mentors.
Start Date: 2/24/2019
End Date: 5/19/2019

Project Team Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team Leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Sponsor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Champion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Owner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Names have been deleted for anonymity

Problem Statement:
For the last 6 months, volunteer onboarding took 217 days on average to process prospective volunteers, which has resulted in 20% of Guardian Scholars who were not matched with a mentor by August 1.

Objective
Reduce onboarding timeline from 217 days to 90 days within 3 months to meet 100% of volunteer needs.

Scope
Volunteer Touchpoint, Contact Information Collected, Orientation, Online Profile Created, Background Check, Interview, Training, Match Volunteer With Student, Begin Mentoring

Primary Metric(s):
- Onboard Volunteers

Secondary Metric(s):
- March 100% of students with mentors.

Project Schedule including Key Deliverables & Dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Deliverable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/23/2019</td>
<td>Define Report Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/12/2019</td>
<td>Measure Report Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/8/2019</td>
<td>Improve Report Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/14/2019</td>
<td>Final Project Report Out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tuesday 5pm Sponsor Meetings
Tuesday 10am Weekly Team Meetings
Project Charter – Mother’s Clinic

Problem Statement:
Between the months of October, 2018 and January, 2019 the internal medication ordering and inventory management process took an average of 9 business days, resulting in a total of 12.52 hours of wasted human potential and $615.19 in unnecessary costs.

Objective:
Improve internal medication ordering and inventory management at the Clinic to reduce time from 9 business days to 3 business days and unnecessary costs of $1,777.22 by May 8, 2019.

Scope:
To improve the current medication ordering and inventory management process.

Performance Metrics:
Primary Metric: Reduce the time dedicated to ordering, maintaining, and receiving the internal medication inventory
Project Charter – Champion Family

Project Name: Improve client check-in process at #1 Family Resource Center

Problem Statement: From July 1, 2018, to the end of January 2019, client check-in time has averaged 599 seconds at Champion’s #1 Family Resource Center (FRC), increasing client stress.

Objective: By June 30, 2019, reduce average client check-in time at FRC from 599 seconds minutes to 180 seconds, reducing client stress/increasing satisfaction.

Scope-In: Process starting from receipt of referral to client’s meeting staff.

Scope-Out: Post-handoff activities, other sites.

Performance Metrics:
Primary: Average client check-in time, measured as the time between 2 events: 1) client arrives at door of SAY FRC; 2) program staff receives the client.

Secondary: Client satisfaction rating, covering as much of process as can be captured with minimal bias.
Project Charter

Project Title: Study Stars After School Program (ASAP) Enrollment and Retention for school year 2021-2022

Problem Statement:
Low enrollment rate in Study Stars After School Program is affecting Opportunity Cost and Bottom Line expenses. Currently enrolling an average of 10 students per ASAP. As of September 23, 2021, 4 out of 14 ASAP have 20 students enrolled. Enrollment begins in August of the school year 2021-2022.

Scope:
The scope defines the boundaries of the project.

Steps:
1. Study Stars After School Program
2. Heads Up After School Program

Steps Out:
Teach, deliver, method, students’ knowledge base, marketing, outreach, all other programs

Project Objective:
Increase Enrollment and Retains 20 Students per 14 Study Stars After School Programs (ASAP) for school year 2021-2022 by December 8, 2021.

Performance Measures (Metrics):
Measures against level of process performance and the impact on organizational performance.

Primary Metric: Students Enrolled (20) per ASAP program
Track weekly enrollment and retention

Secondary Metric: Retention Rate (100%)
APPENDIX J

Action Inquiry Adapted from Tolbert (2004)

Action inquiry is “a way of simultaneously conducting action and inquiry as a disciplined leadership practice that increases the wider effectiveness of our actions” (Tolbert, et al., p. 1, 2004). Action inquiry works at the individual, team, and organizational levels and “still larger institutions become more capable of self-transformation and thus more creative, more aware, more just, and more sustainable” (Tolbert, et al., p. 1, 2004). Furthermore, Tolbert offers a typology called action-logics that demonstrates the developmental process with seven characterizations: The Opportunist, The Diplomat, The Expert, The Achiever, The Individualist, The Strategist, and The Alchemist. A summary of the action-logics is as follows (Rooke & Torbert, 2005):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characterization</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Opportunist</td>
<td>Wins at any way possible; eye for an eye</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Diplomat</td>
<td>Avoids conflict and wants to belong</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Expert</td>
<td>Rules by logic and expertise</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Achiever</td>
<td>Effectively achieves goals thru teams</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Individualist</td>
<td>Interweaves competing personal and company action logics</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Strategist</td>
<td>Generates organizational and personal transformation</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Alchemist</td>
<td>Generates social transformation</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Action inquiry and action-logics put forth by Torbert is a compatible leadership model for teaching LSS because it prescribes how individuals should behave to generate organizational change. It is a theory and model where individuals create their identity through an organizational lens.
IRB #: IRB-2022-102
Title: Nonprofit leader perceptions of sector-bending
Creation Date: 10-14-2021
End Date: 
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Beverly Codallos
Review Board: USD IRB
Sponsor: 

Study History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Submission Type</th>
<th>Review Type</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Expedited</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>Expedited</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Study Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beverly Codallos</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:becodallos@sandiego.edu">becodallos@sandiego.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans Schmitz</td>
<td>Primary Contact</td>
<td><a href="mailto:schmitz@sandiego.edu">schmitz@sandiego.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>