



DEMYSTIFYING SIX SIGMA

By Dr Vinny Sastri

Mention the words Six Sigma and it conjures up emotions from awe and admiration to skepticism and cynicism. Six Sigma does have a certain sense of mysticism about it with terms like green belts, black belts and critical to quality thrown into its vocabulary.

So what exactly is Six Sigma?

Six Sigma, a term coined by Motorola, is nothing new. It is an evolution of various quality initiatives like Total Quality Management (TQM) and is a standardized, rigorous, data-driven, problem-solving methodology. It focuses on removing variation and improving the consistency of those *critical* requirements of a product or a process that are important to a customer. The end result is a consistent product or process that improves the bottom line of an organization. Six Sigma is a cost reduction initiative focusing on efficiency and profitability.

There is a saying that “without data everyone has an opinion and everyone is an expert.” The Six Sigma process removes the emotion out of decision-making and focuses on the real hard facts, data and information. Data management and statistical analysis is thus an integral part of the process. The Six Sigma problem-solving methodology includes defining and quantifying the problem in terms of quality and profitability, identifying the root causes of variation, implementing the solution, and ensuring the solution is effective, permanent and sustainable.

According to Mikel Harry and Richard Schroeder, who started the Six Sigma Academy where Larry Bossidy and Jack

Welch first heard and learned about Six Sigma, “**Six Sigma is a business process** that allows companies to drastically improve their bottom line by designing and monitoring everyday business activities in ways that minimize resources while increasing customer satisfaction.... Six Sigma guides companies into making fewer mistakes.... It provides specific methods to re-create the process so that defects and errors never arise in the first place.”

Who does Six Sigma apply to?

Six Sigma can be deployed and implemented in small, medium and large companies. Six Sigma is most beneficial for medium and large organizations whose complex systems can result in significant variation and inefficiencies. There is also a myth that Six Sigma applies only to manufacturing environments. Service industries like banking, financial, information technology and healthcare have seen the largest return on investment because many processes hide a lot of intangible redundancies and inefficiencies.

Is Six Sigma right for you?

The first thing any organization needs to do is determine whether or not an effective, sustainable, continuous improvement mentality needs to be part of the corporate culture.

Should employees be empowered to find, resolve and improve products and processes that will make the organization more efficient and profitable? If the answer is yes, then a clear vision, commitment and implementation strategy needs to be formulated. This strategy includes the commitment, training and involvement of all employees (upper management included). It also requires effective change

About Winovia

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management, deployment and implementation plans.

Six Sigma is not a quick fix and is not easy. However, the benefits are significant if there is a commitment towards building an organization that embeds and values the continuous improvement mentality into its very core.