

# Follow me

## I'm right behind you on this Six Sigma thing

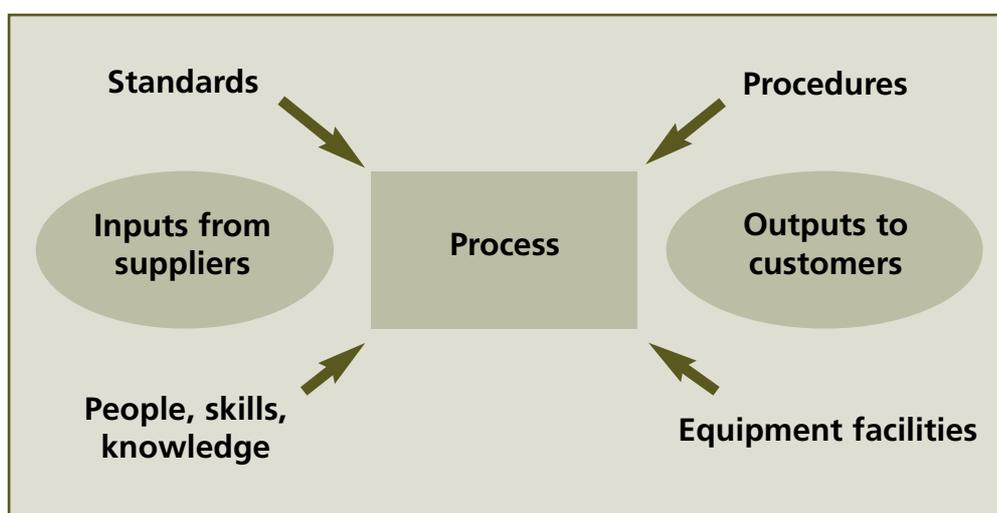
I'm sure all of you will have used brainstorming to generate ideas. Negative brainstorming looks to generate ideas, too, but ones that will help you achieve the opposite of what you really want to achieve. As an example, we might brainstorm 'how we can ensure our organisation is fined for a health and safety breach?' or 'how can we ensure our meetings are a complete waste of time or badly run?'

When we have generated our list of ideas and actions, we can do one of two things. We can either 'change the signs' so that we have a list of things that will help us achieve what we really want and/or we can ask ourselves 'how many of these things are we doing?' This can be an extremely interesting exercise and the answers often bring an unpleasant surprise or two!

So let's play. What are your ideas to ensure that a Six Sigma initiative fails? The list below gives you a few good ideas, but I'm sure that you can add many of your own.

- Lack of real management commitment – simply a lip-service approach;
- Ensure the improvement efforts are not linked to the strategy or business plan;
- Don't train our managers to manage processes;
- Ensure there are no 'Six Sigma objectives' in the managers personal goals and objectives for the year;
- Ensure the reward and recognition policy excludes the behaviours and goals associated with Six Sigma;
- Ensure the people working in the processes are not involved in any improvement efforts;
- Make all decisions based on gut feel rather than data;
- Make no differentiation between natural and special cause variation ensuring that we tamper with our

The focus of this article in John Morgan's series on Six Sigma is leadership and management. Let's play a game that you may not be familiar with: 'negative brainstorming', says Morgan.



### *Negative Brainstorming*



*How can we ensure meetings are a disaster?*

*How can we ensure the organisation is fined for health and safety breach?*

*'Change the signs to positive', or ask 'how many of these things are we doing?!'*

**A Process Is Managed When**

It's owned

There's a clear customer focused objective and agreed requirements

There's a process map

There's a balance of input, process and output measures

It's been measured for six months

It's in statistical control

It's capable or there is a plan in place to move to that position

There's a response plan for when things go wrong, for example

that GE does. Managers do not get promotion, for example, unless they have completed specific Six Sigma training, passed an exam and successfully led improvement projects. So guess what, they do it! But what sort of thinking goes on in the minds of so many other business leaders and managers who appear to play games when it comes to achieving quality. I use the word 'play', because it's clear that very few are serious about achieving it. If we ask the question, 'who's in favour of defect-free products and processes?' I'm sure everyone would

continually find ways of improving it. One of the first things for the manager to then realise is the need to meet the requirements of the process.

Very simply, if we are to meet the requirements of our customers, we need the right number of people in place at the right time, and with the right skills, knowledge and experience. And we need to ensure that there are training plans in place to develop their potential or close any gaps in their capabilities.

We need the right equipment in terms of machines and software and

## A process is managed when there's a balance of input, process and output measures

Figure 2

processes and increase variation as a result;

- Ignore the real 'voice of the customer' and assume that you know what your customer's requirements are.

Negative brainstorming can be a fun exercise and you'll find that most people seem to be very creative in negative mode.

Culture plays a big part in successful Six Sigma initiatives. And the culture, systems and outputs of organisations reflect the thinking that goes on within them, but particularly at the top.

**"The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking which caused them" Albert Einstein**

Consider this quotation from Albert Einstein:

'The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking which caused them'.

Six Sigma thinking is what's needed; and General Electric's retired chairman and CEO Jack Welch demonstrates that thinking in so many ways.

He was determined to make Six Sigma a natural part of the way GE's business was (and is) run. That involved total commitment from him to put it and keep it on the agenda and to integrate it with everything

say 'yes', particularly your customers. And yet management behaviour suggests otherwise. Consider the number of management fads that have been and gone; or the number of total quality initiatives that burned briefly bright then faded and died. How could it happen? How could organisations invest all that time, effort and money into them and yet allow them to fail? The simple yet complex answer is leadership and management.

At least some of the actions that leaders and managers must do have been identified in the earlier articles in this series, and indeed in the negative brainstorm list above. For me, one of the keys is for managers to understand that their role is to manage processes. And I really mean manage. My definition of a managed process is shown in figure 2. Imagine the impact on your organisation and your customers if you were doing this across the board.

The problem is that very few organisations train their managers to manage processes, though. As a consequence, they tend to focus on managing and blaming people for things that go wrong. Deming summed this up well when he said: "Eighty-five percent of the reasons for failure to meet customer expectations are related to deficiencies in systems and process, rather than the employee. The role of management is to change the process rather than badgering individuals to do better."

The role of the manager should be to work on the process, with the people in the process and to

we need to make sure it's maintained and kept up to date. And, of course, we need the right facilities for our activities.

Procedures can be linked to process maps, but must be kept up to date and presented in a way that's user friendly so that they are understood, followed and actively used. The same is true of 'standards', which apply. These may be to do with regulatory requirements, or service standards and authority limits, for example.

The requirements of the process may seem obvious, but so often they are overlooked. Ensuring they are met is part of the manager's role in managing processes.

So, in future years, will your customers be experiencing service that represents an entirely new dimension or will it be 'business as usual?' As leaders it's your choice.

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