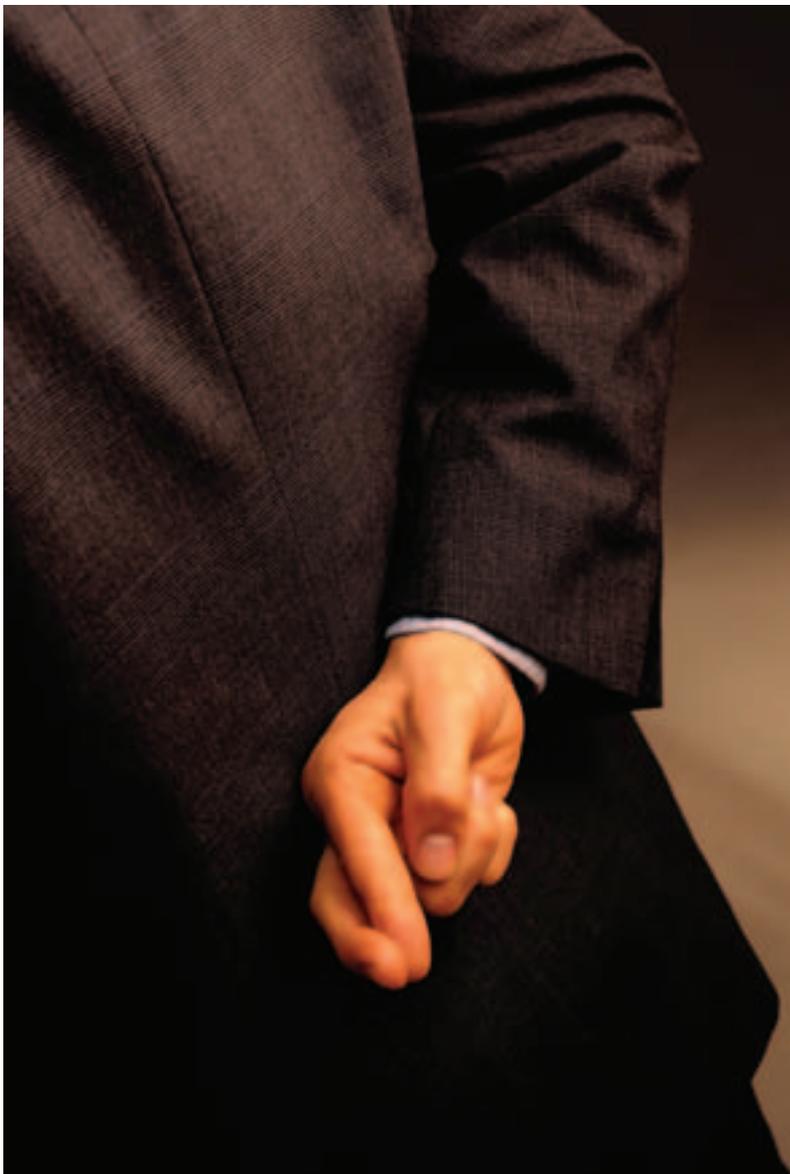


Six Sigma and the future of quality

By John Morgan and Martyin Brenning-Jones

Imagine your customers are at least satisfied and, in many cases, delighted with your products and services. Imagine your shareholders feel the same about your stock market performance and the dividends they receive. Imagine, too, that your highly trained and skilled workforce feel great about working in your organisation. And you have excellent relationships with your suppliers who feel they have a genuine partnership with you.



By genuinely understanding your customers' requirements and developing efficient and effective processes, your results are outstanding. Sales and market share have increased and continue to do so, and your expenses have been maintained or reduced. And importantly, people satisfaction surveys show that your staff feel empowered and genuinely supported by management in their quest to improve processes and the way they work.

Impossible to imagine? It could happen only in the world of Hans Christian Anderson? Or is this the result of the rigorous application of Six Sigma throughout your organisation? It's up to you.

Unless you create a vision of where you want to be, you will find it difficult to get there. And even if you do create this Six Sigma vision, it won't be easy. It will take time, commitment, and genuine leadership throughout the organisation. Almost certainly, it will demand and create a change in culture especially in terms of the role and behaviour of managers.

The pressure is on short term results with continuous fire fighting and gut feel 'by the seat of the pants' decisions. So, given that scenario, does Six Sigma have a future? And what of quality?

With customers increasingly demanding improved performance from their suppliers, quality must have a part to play. If we carried out an electronic survey of this readership, then I feel sure you would all indicate that you are in favour of quality. The question is, how do we achieve it?

This series of articles focuses on Six Sigma (see Winter and Spring *Management Services Journal*) but we have also referenced the EFQM's Excellence Model and demonstrated the clear links between the two. More and more, I feel it is likely that we will see convergence, not only with the Excellence Model and Six Sigma, but also with the revised ISO 9001:2000 standard.

BS5750 and ISO as were, achieved dreadful press in the not so distant

past, essentially due to bureaucratic implementation often undertaken by cowboy management consultants. All too often, the exercise was undertaken simply to get 'the badge.' The principles, however, were sound. Write down what you do, do what you wrote down, and prove it. The trouble was that in theory what you did, didn't have to be any good!

The new ISO 9001:2000 calls not only for compliance but for improvement. The Sigma improvement approach fits very comfortably with this since it 'promotes the adoption of a process approach when developing, implementing and improving the effectiveness of a quality management system (QMS), to enhance customer satisfaction by meeting customer requirements.'

The revised standard is widely regarded as a major step forward from ISO 9001:1994, with stronger emphasis on customer focus and continuous improvement. Having a sound measurement system is essential; the new standard expects it to be prominent and linked to customer requirements. As you can see, ISO 9001:2000 and Six Sigma are clearly based on the same fundamental principles of quality. To

quote from FDIS ISO 9001:2000 'such a (process) approach emphasises the importance of:

- Understanding and fulfilling requirements;
- The need to consider processes in terms of added value;
- Obtaining results of process performance and effectiveness;
- Continual improvement of processes based on effective measurement.

The process-based QMS model focuses on understanding customer requirements and measuring results to assess whether these requirements have been met. Six Sigma's improvement philosophy aligns well with this. Both are underpinned by an understanding of the strong connection between what the customer wants and what the process delivers.

The successful aspects of Six Sigma, the Excellence Model and the new ISO converge into 'Sigma Excellence', which is increasingly being viewed as the future of quality. It can only be a matter of time before this hybrid becomes the accepted quality methodology, taking the best from the past and revitalising the subject,

not just for quality professionals but also for the boardroom.

After all, we all want 'quality' in the simplest and deepest meaning of the word, don't we?

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