Chapter 4
Successful Implementation of Six Sigma Considering Management Styles
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ABSTRACT
Why is management style so important to Six Sigma implementation? Many writers have attempted to define managers as effective quality leaders. Particularly following the 1920s, a great deal of research focused on worker motivation. Prior to the 1920s most employees were looked at as machines and their needs and wants were ignored. Employees were viewed as a disposable resource, driving the belief that motivating employees and sharing organizational development ideas were not integral to business practice. This style of management discouraged employees from feeling as a part of the organization and taking a stake in development efforts. McGregor identified two distinct managerial approaches, labeling them Theory X and Y; theory X was the more prevalent behavioral style identified among managers in the first half of the twentieth century. A statistical approach to quality control was also beginning to emerge during this period, with origins in the well-known so-called Hawthorne experiments. At this time, while Japanese companies were developing quality methods, western manufacturers were focusing their efforts on marketing, production quantity, and financial performance. An awakening to quality in western firms did not occur until the 1980s, with Six Sigma as one of the offspring of this movement. Six Sigma is a set of strategies, techniques, and tools for process improvement. One of the outcome of Six Sigma implementation is an infrastructure of people within the organization who are experts in this method. Six Sigma not only emphasizes setting rigorous objectives, collecting data, and analyzing results to a fine degree as a way to reduce defects in products and services, but it can also be an effective

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5958-2.ch004
management tool. As such, successful implementation requires managerial commitment. This level of commitment will depend on the managers’ perceptions of their workers’ motivation. Although a great deal of research has been conducted on worker motivation, limited research exists that explores the possible connection between managers’ perception of workers’ motivation and Six Sigma commitment and success. The writers of this chapter have explored this issue and found that the majority of participants in their study were Theory Y managers with the same level of interest in Six Sigma as Theory X managers. The results indicate that although successful implementation of Six Sigma is independent from the management style (Theory X or Y), it requires management support and determination. Furthermore, the findings did not rule out other possible factors that could be influencing Six Sigma success, such as the dedication of Six Sigma champions or their skills in implementing Six Sigma.

INTRODUCTION

Six Sigma is considered a management tool as well as a process improvement tool. Today, it is widely utilized as a strategic tool for reinforcing organizational goals, assuring accountability, and sustaining quality (Tata and Jones, 2011). The success of Six Sigma relies heavily on adequate communication, employee commitment, and management support (Burns, 2005). The success of Six Sigma implementation efforts are jeopardized when these three components are lacking. Recent literature pertaining to the organizational improvement process has proposed Agile Methodologies (Kendall et al., 2010) and Quality Strategies and Quality Information Systems (Sakthivel et al., 2006). It could be argued that studies relating to these approaches have overlooked the importance of management commitment. The commitment includes motivating employees to bring them together for a stress-free and voluntary implementation. As such, motivating employees becomes a critical activity. Effective managers understand that tasks are completed with or through people, and that motivation plays a crucial role. If managers want to succeed in achieving their goals, they need to understand how it is that their employees are motivated. Likewise, it is a mistake to assume that all employees are motivated in the same way. In Six Sigma implementation, many layers of the organization are involved. Therefore, it is important to not only understand the needs of the individuals, but those of each layer as well. It is essential, therefore, that managers who want to establish and maintain an organizational climate that motivates employees continuously remind themselves that different employees have different needs, wants, and goals.

Although Six Sigma’s benefits are well documented in the literature, leading to increased interest in this as one of many process improvement tools, little has been written about the motivation theories that undergird successful implementation of Six Sigma. To begin an exploration of the relationship between motivation and Six Sigma implementation, it is essential to first understand management’s perception of workers, since their perceptions form the foundation of numerous well-known motivational theories.

Classical management believes that employees do not like to work, therefore the best motivators are fear and financial rewards. This type of manager believes that since employees need to work, they are more responsive to fear of suspension, demotion and punishment. Although this may be a short run solution, in the long run the effect is an unhealthy environment where employees withdraw from work and become more cautious, which in turn leads to a search for other employment opportunities. In contrast, the behavioral management approach relies on more positive factors for employees. Such managers believe that employees enjoy working in an environment where their needs are understood and valued,
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