Analyzing Management Style and Successful Implementation of Six Sigma

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on the effects of management style in successful implementation of Six Sigma. The authors collected data using a 18-item survey, classified managers from a wide range of industry, healthcare, military, and services into one of two management styles using Douglas McGregor’s Theory of X and Y, and compared these classifications among the survey respondents to determine the level of Six Sigma commitment and success. Six Sigma is just one of many tools used to improve processes within an organization that requires management commitment. This level of commitment will depend on a manager perception of worker motivation. Despite an existing body of literature on worker motivation, limited research has been conducted that explores the possible connection between manager perception of worker motivation and the organization’s commitment and success with Six Sigma. The results are explored further in the article.

Keywords: Management Style, Quality Management, Six Sigma, Theory X&Y, Worker Motivation

INTRODUCTION

Process improvement requires management commitment, since management has great influence on workers and is ultimately responsible for the organization’s processes. Recent studies pertaining to the improvement of organizational processes have included Agile Methodologies (Kendall et al., 2010), Quality Strategies and Quality Information Systems (Sakthivel et al., 2006). A noted shortcoming in this literature has been an exploration of management commitment. This level of commitment will depend on the management’s perception of workers. If they perceive workers as lazy and requiring constant supervision, their attitudes and actions toward workers will be autocratic in nature. In contrast, if they perceive workers as motivated and having the organization’s best interest in mind, they are more likely to be encouraging and inspiring to workers. As well cited motivation theories clearly emphasize, managers that encourage and inspire workers are more likely to contribute to workers’ level of motivation and ultimately their productivity, since there is substantial literature linking motivation to increased productivity (Moore, Cruickshank, & Haas, 2006).
Although Six Sigma’s benefits are well documented in the literature, leading to increased interest in this one of many process improvement tools, little is known about the relationship between motivation theories and Six Sigma. Therefore, we need to first understand management’s perception of workers, since management perceptions form the foundation of some of the well-known motivational theories.

Unfortunately, although the motivational theory literature is replete with significant research that explores management perception of workers and the benefits of different management styles, little research has explored the relationship of motivational theory and, more specifically, management styles to Six Sigma implementation and success. Therefore, this study has attempted to achieve a better understanding of manager perception toward workers and its relationship to Six Sigma by: 1) determining what these perceptions are, 2) classifying managers into two major classes of managers based on their perception of workers, and 3) attempting to identify any relationships that actually exist between management styles and Six Sigma implementation and success.

Douglas McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y are leading motivational theories that form the foundation of this study and aid in the classification of managers who responded to the survey as either Theory X or Theory Y managers. This paper will describe this study and present its outcomes.

MOTIVATION THEORY

While there are many definitions of motivation available in the literature (Bilge, 2006), the definition provided by Kaliprasad (2006) is worth noting, since it strikes at the heart of the study of motivation that seeks to understand what it is that drives a free society to be willing to work. Kaliprasad’s (p. 22) “willingness to work” definition of motivation is simple yet powerful, since it reaches to the core of the study of motivation. For decades, researchers have repeatedly attempted to determine what factors create this willingness in workers. Therefore, researchers attempted to determine what these factors are, since there is substantial evidence linking motivation to improved productivity (Moore et al., 2006). Unfortunately, research has shown that there are many different factors that can affect worker motivation (Rosser & Townsend, 2006). As a result, many different motivational theories have evolved.

Prior to the 1930s, most motivational theories focused on factors such as job design and financial rewards as factors that motivate workers (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996). As Hersey et al. point out, psychological needs of workers was not an area of concern and therefore was not given much attention when it came to the study of motivation. Instead, researchers were interested in finding ways to make workers more productive by designing jobs in ways that allow them to be more productive. For example, researchers were concentrating on issues such as lighting within work areas. The Hawthorne studies of the 1920s originally set out to study lighting intensity and its effect on productivity, when researchers accidently discovered that workers became more productive when they felt managers cared enough about them to observe them and were interested in making their job more comfortable. These early studies discovered that human emotional needs, if met, can improve productivity.

The 1920 Hawthorne studies began to change how researchers and managers viewed worker motivation (Hersey et al., 1996). Prior to the Hawthorne discoveries, managers rarely cared if the workers’ basic psychological needs were being addressed. Managers were more concerned with how they could keep a close eye on workers to make sure they continued to work. Managers felt that workers needed to be constantly supervised and coerced into producing more. Furthermore, managers believed that workers would work harder if they felt they would receive greater financial rewards. Management styles were primarily autocratic prior to the Hawthorne studies.

Since motivation was directly tied to workers’ emotional needs during the Hawthorne
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