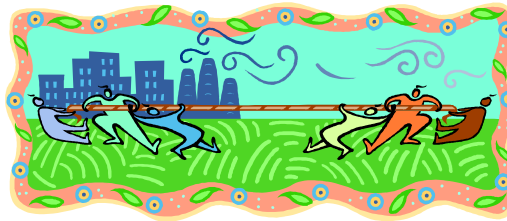


Don't Forget The Softer Side of Six Sigma!

By Andy Brown



When I learnt I had been selected for black belt training, I was a little apprehensive. Statistics had never been my forte and I'd managed to avoid the subject up to that point. My four weeks of Six Sigma training didn't fail to meet expectations. The consultancy that the company had selected to deliver the training had the old school approach to Six Sigma. About 75% of the course focussed on the statistics with a little process mapping to boot. As long as you had the data and the wherewithal to apply the statistics, the processes couldn't help but improve.

This approach worked on my first project which focused on defect reduction in a manufacturing environment. I learnt to master the analytical techniques, identified the root causes and corrected them. The solution was simple variation reduction of an identified critical characteristic on some process fixturing. Once fixed, the process stayed fixed marking the successful end to my first project.

With my new found confidence, I sought new projects. The approach I took on my second project followed the same winning formula, data collection followed by rigorous application of the statistical techniques. Again, out dropped the root causes and a proposed solution. In this case the solution involved closer monitoring and control of a vital x. Instead of changing an inanimate object as done in my first project, this involved changing people's attitudes and the way they operated. The launch of my new process fell flat. It was effective whilst I drove it, but the minute I stepped away the people slipped back into their old working practices. The solution wasn't sustainable and I couldn't close my project. It took several months of hard work using various influencing strategies to get the solution to stick. It was a painful experience.

I learnt an important lesson. People don't like doing things differently, they don't like change. The best solution in the world will fail if the people affected haven't bought into it.

How could I have managed the change more effectively? Upon reflection, I recognised that the solution had been sprung without warning on the stakeholders. They recoiled and dug their heels in – marking the beginning of the long battle to push the change through. By recognising the various stakeholder groups and understanding their perspectives, actions could have been developed early to bring them onside. Through an effective communication strategy the key stakeholder groups could have been informed and involved as the project progressed. By the time the change was defined there would have been no surprises. This activity should have started way back in the Define phase continuing through to Improve.

It turns out that the soft stuff is the hard stuff. Statistics alone will not create world class organisations. Just as the DMAICT methodology provides a rigorous framework for conducting process and data analysis, the same rigor needs to be applied to the management of change. Without appropriate consideration of the softer side of Six Sigma, many companies will achieve only short-lived benefits.

That's why Burge Hughes Walsh has developed belt training programmes that not only provide process and data analysis tools but also include a comprehensive toolset for project and change management. These techniques are integrated into every phase of the methodology, maximising the potential for successful project delivery.

For further information on available programmes contact enquiries@burgehugheswalsh.co.uk