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**Countering The False Notion That Six Sigma Is Elitist**

**By Peter Peterka**

Too often, when people think of Six Sigma and black belts they see them as having an elitist

connotation. The opinion that Six Sigma is elitist or that black belts are elitist, however, are false. In its purest form Six Sigma is a "way of life" for an organization serious about process improvement. It just happens to have certain characteristics that people like to throw stones at. That some people have come to believe this false notion is because they have misinterpreted the nature of Six Sigma and not seen the complete picture.

There is an air of mysteriousness that surrounds what Six Sigma black belts do. People experience projects where black belts are left alone to crunch numbers and work on long projects in isolated offices far from the factory floor. They wonder what exactly happens behind the scenes and not knowing, become apprehensive. This is especially true when they know the outcomes will affect them. If employees have not received any training in Six Sigma, their ignorance about the processes will lead them to mistrust and even fear the Six Sigma project and the experts guiding the project.

Other people have developed resentment toward Six Sigma consultants themselves. Certainly, there are some individual consultants who are arrogant, uncooperative, and insensitive to others. That, though, reflects on that individual and does not represent Six Sigma. There are people in all fields and professions who are not nice or have an inflated opinion of themselves. Six Sigma is not about self-aggrandizement. It is not about lording over people. Unfortunately, some people are more concerned with obtaining a Six Sigma certification than with appreciating what the newly acquired skills will allow them to deliver to their organization. The priority of Six Sigma training should be to deliver value to one's business and to the customers of one's business. Training to become a Six Sigma team leader gives one skills and tools, but doesn't give one a right to be elitist.

Six Sigma is about getting everyone involved. A Six Sigma project forms a team of people who work together to identify problems and develop solutions. Such teams are not elitist teams rearranging the world for everyone else to live in. These teams are serving the organization by employing the skills and tools they have learned to increase quality and reduce defects. The Six Sigma black belts who are leading these teams are likewise seeking only to lend their skills learned through training.

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There are plenty of ways to fail and it is always convenient to blame the tool. If you look hard enough though, the failure is the fault of a lack of planning and training. If an organization does not plan properly and train properly, there is no doubt about the outcome of that program. If management truly has their eye on the goals and is intent on providing quality products and services, then Six Sigma can keep everyone focused and part of the team. The reality is that Six Sigma isn't glamorous and it isn't sexy. It is just plain hard work.

Countering the false idea that Six Sigma is elitist is part of ensuring the success of your Six Sigma initiatives. The best way to do that is training all members of your organization in basic Six Sigma concepts can go a long way toward taking away the mysteriousness of Six Sigma and the elitist misconception some people have. Give people the knowledge and tools they need to do the job and they will thrive. Help all the members of your organization understand what Six Sigma does and how it does it. Not everyone needs to go through all of the Six Sigma training required to reach black belt qualification, but there are simple programs you can put in place to help people learn Six Sigma basics.

If you look only to the number crunching part of Six Sigma and ignore the organizational and human side, ignorance, and the resentment that comes from it, are inevitable. Including everyone affected by the Six Sigma project and giving them information they need to understand what is going on and how they can contribute will yield dividends.

<http://www.6sigma.us/>

Peter Peterka is the Principal Consultant in practice areas of DMAIC and DFSS.

Peter has eleven years of experience performing as a Master Black Belt, and has over 15 years experience in industry as an improvement specialist and engineer working with numerous companies.

### **Why Six Sigma Will Outlast Total Quality Management**

**By Peter Peterka**

Six Sigma is not just a new term for Total Quality Management (TQM) . They have many similarities and are compatible in many business environments. TQM has brought great improvements and value to many companies. Six Sigma can do more.

TQM is the development, deployment, and maintenance of systems related to quality-producing business processes. TQM is a strategic approach that focuses on encouraging a continuous flow of incremental quality improvements. It encourages the establishing of a culture of collaboration among different departments within organization. TQM is mainly a cultural initiative and a style of management toward increased quality.

Six Sigma is not just another quality initiative or process improvement program. It is more than that because it is a robust continuous improvement strategy and process that includes cultural methodologies such as the various TQM approaches. Six Sigma is complementary to TQM initiatives

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such as ISO 9000 registration, which is mainly procedural; Total Quality Management (TQM), which is mainly cultural, and Statistical Process Control (SPC), which is primarily statistical process control monitoring. All of these initiatives attempt to improve quality levels but typically reach a plateau. The Six Sigma approach goes to the next level.

Six Sigma is not about quality in the strict traditional sense. Quality, defined traditionally as conformance to internal requirements, is not the focus of Six Sigma. True, Six Sigma focuses on improving quality by helping organizations produce products and services better, faster and cheaper. However, it accomplishes that by reducing waste. In traditional terms, Six Sigma focuses on defect prevention, cycle time reduction, and cost savings. Six Sigma is about helping the organization make more money. Unlike cost-cutting programs that reduce value and quality, Six Sigma identifies and eliminates costs that provide no value to customers: the costs incurred due to waste.

The focus of TQM initiatives differs from the focus of Six Sigma programs. One, TQM programs focus on improvement in individual operations with unrelated processes. Six Sigma focuses on making improvements in all operations within a process. Two, Six Sigma involves dedicated, full-time resources--the "black belts"--versus TQM, which is usually a part-time activity of non-dedicated managers.

The breadth and depth and the precision of Six Sigma and TQM also differ. Six Sigma has a well-defined project charter that outlines the scope of a project, financial targets, anticipated benefits, milestones, etc. It's based on hard financial data and savings. In TQM, organizations go into a project without fully knowing what the financial gains might be. Six Sigma has a solid control phase (DMAIC - Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control) that makes specific measurements, identifies specific problems, and provides specific solutions that can be measured.

How else is Six Sigma different? Six Sigma is:

- \* Fact based and data driven
- \* Results-oriented, providing quantifiable and measurable bottom-line results
- \* A leader-sponsored top-down approach
- \* Linked to strategy
- \* Thinking about customer requirements
- \* Applicable to all business processes – administrative, sales, marketing, R&D, etc.

Six Sigma is a robust continuous improvement strategy and process that includes cultural methodologies such as Total Quality Management (TQM), process control strategies such as Statistical Process Control (SPC) and other important statistical tools. Six Sigma tools and techniques all are found in total quality management. Six Sigma is the application of the tools on selected important projects at the appropriate time. Six Sigma tools and techniques all are found in TQM. When

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done correctly, Six Sigma becomes a way toward organization and cultural development. Yet, it is more than a set of tools! Six Sigma is the strategic and systematic application of the tools on targeted important projects at the appropriate time. Because Six Sigma incorporates TQM but goes beyond it, it will outlast TQM.

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