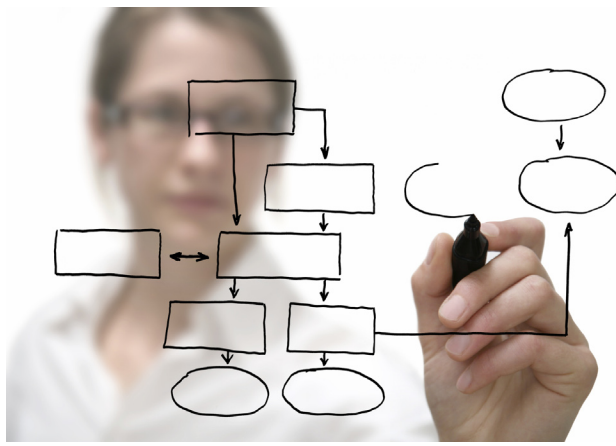


9 Ways to Recharge Your Six Sigma Program



Recharging your performance improvement program is not the easiest task, how do you know when its time? Here are the telling symptoms:

- Your company has not revisited its initial approach over the last three years.
- Your Black Belts aren't performing at the expected success rate.
- Projects often lack discipline and simply don't add up to great results.
- Less than 25% of employees even know about your program.
- You are seeing a limited impact on your company's business strategies and goals.
- Your organization has not been able to link performance objectives with project results.
- Your program is limited to traditional Six Sigma and does not include any work in Lean, Workout or other methodologies.
- There appears to be no or limited process management focus.
- You see additional opportunities for metrics and measurements but are not sure how to get there.
- You have had limited success in integrating your initiatives with your business culture.

Simply training more belts and shouting louder for more support isn't going to get you there. Instead, consider these nine areas that you may need to focus on to "recharge" your Six Sigma or other performance excellence program.

#1 - Current State Evaluation

You may be using Six Sigma, Lean, Enterprise Resource Planning, Supply Chain Integration or any of many other approaches. Your efforts may or may not be integrated, and they may be deployed globally or inside pockets of the organization. The question you need to ask is, are you using each methodology to its fullest potential?

And, are they integrated and performing at optimal levels? If not, what may make better sense given your current situation and your goals? The answers to these questions lead naturally to the ability to develop and drive a roadmap and identify priorities.

#2 - Project Selection

When projects are improperly scoped and selected, it can poison even the most well-intentioned efforts and lead to a failure of the entire program. Therefore, it is important to optimize how your company selects and scopes projects for execution, making sure they tie directly into the strategic intent of the organization. Do your projects link to your business strategy, operations and customer processes?

#3 - Alignment

How well are your key leaders and process owners aligned and linked to your performance improvement strategy? You may have started your program by getting the right people involved, but over time how has that changed? Are there new leaders who have joined the organization but who are not familiar with, and may be hampering, your performance excellence program? Or perhaps it is simply time for everyone to re-connect and discuss the desired outcomes and roles inside your organization. In any case, people have to be aligned in accordance with your performance improvement strategy.

#4 - Project Results

While project success means something different to every company, there are some universal standards you can apply to see how you are doing compared to others. For example, are your projects meeting or exceeding industry averages? How many projects do you have in the

queue from certain business areas? And what are the estimated savings of these projects? Also, do you replicate successful projects across the business, and if not why? What sort of controls and sustainability levels do your current projects have? Taking a hard look here will give you insight and clues to improving your ability to execute performance improvement projects of any nature.

#5 - Knowledge Transfer

How and who you train is important. Simply training belts without giving them direct mentoring support, or ways to refresh their skills, could be hazardous to your performance improvement health. Mapping out the current state of your training process will reveal if the training process itself is flawed in some way, assuming you are not getting the results you expected.

#6 - Practitioner Development

How are you attracting, developing and retaining employees throughout your program? Different companies have varied approaches for gauging the success of their recruiting and practitioner development efforts. Companies that are not committed to truly recruiting and developing their top talent often find their inattention results in poorer performance. Look at how you gauge practitioner competency, and examine your ongoing talent development process to look for lost opportunities.

#7 - Communication

What is your process for communicating information about your program to all of your employees? The right time and way to talk about Six Sigma is highly dependent on the company and its culture. But revitalizing your efforts will require an analysis of your internal communication process. How and when are you talking about performance improvement to employees, shareholders, clients and analysts? Are you conversing with your supply chain about your efforts and trying to get their involvement? And in what ways do you share stories about your success with others?

#8 - Culture

Since company culture drives a great deal of your program's success or failure, it's critical to look at how others perceive and talk about your program and its success in the enterprise. Are the process excellence team members seen as elitists? Data hounds? Fire fighters? Ideally, your process improvement team should be viewed as future leaders and enablers for cost reduction and revenue generation. If this is not the case, it may take some work to turn that around.

#9 - Metrics

What are the measurements your company is using to drive business? The choices for measuring success are many and there is no right answer on which metrics are the best to use. The only requirement for success is that your team does use metrics and that they agree universally on what they are. Traditionally, companies track metrics in a combination of these four ways: financial, customer, process and people/systems. By looking at how you gauge success you can more clearly see where you need to focus your program's efforts.

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