

Title:

Communication In Six Sigma

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640

Summary:

Deploying Six Sigma means entering a period of significant change in your organization. Productivity and morale almost always suffers in times of great change. The requirements of change and adaptation and the very human fear of the unknown add to stresses of the work environment. In these times, communication becomes more important than ever.

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Article Body:

Deploying Six Sigma means entering a period of significant change in your organization. Productivity and morale almost always suffers in times of great change. The requirements of change and adaptation and the very human fear of the unknown add to stresses of the work environment. In these times, communication becomes more important than ever.

Communication throughout a Six Sigma project is very important because the power and scope of Six Sigma demands a significant commitment from everyone in the organization. Six Sigma successes require clear and open communication at all levels to transcend departmental barriers that would otherwise cause confusion. In addition, any change in an organization will meet some resistance, either intentional or just because of inertia. When management can effectively communicate that it is behind that change and can communicate the positive aspects of the change, resistance can be countered and overcome.

Company leadership must be willing to give Six Sigma teams all of the tools and information necessary to apply Six Sigma concepts to their day-to-day activities. It is crucial in Six Sigma projects to clarify the rationale, expectations, goals, and sequence of steps in the process. Six Sigma teams with clear, written goals accomplish far more in a shorter period of time than teams

without them could ever imagine. This is true everywhere and under all circumstances. Documentation of the Six Sigma process is the opportunity to resolve any misunderstandings of the deployment. A schedule is developed that outlines the strategy to take the process from its current state to one that is within statistical control and in line with the company's Six Sigma goals. Roles need to be clearly defined in how individuals contribute to the schedule and strategy. Employees assess how they can contribute to the organization through the information they receive. A team's quality goals should be set to tie in with the overall company quality improvement goals. This happens only when the team has the knowledge they need.

Lack of clarity in communicating business information is probably more responsible for frustration and underachievement than any other single factor. It is unfortunately way too easy to not realize that communication is falling short of your organization's needs. Often senior managers sincerely believe they are adequately communicating with employees. However, managers can easily underestimate the number of issues on which employees need information and how much information they need.

How do you know what is important to employees and what to tell them? You need to put yourself in the position of the employees. If you were that person, what would be important for you to know to do your job? What would you be worried about in the current situation? What information would help you deal with change? How would you want to be told? You can't answer those questions yourself. You need input from the very people you are trying to understand. Communication is a two-way street—listening as well as talking. Asking a few individuals what is being said, what people are worrying and wondering about.

Also be aware that the way a person receives news can dramatically affect how he or she feels about it, so you need to choose the medium very carefully. E-mail can be perceived as cold and unfeeling, although it is useful for routine updates that don't have emotional overtones. Many messages are better delivered in person, either to individuals or to the team as a whole.

Communication skills take practice. Always be sure the message remains honest, clear and compassionate. Have integrity and build trust. Don't say what you don't mean. Don't promise anything that you cannot or will not fulfill. Above all, follow through on your commitments and promises. Nothing turns employees off more than feeling betrayed. Sincere, caring, and constant communication will form the basis for building employee engagement throughout Six Sigma deployment.