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### Forget your sixth sense, Six Sigma can take care of business

*Lean Six Sigma can help HR professionals become a better strategic business partner according to Amy Tan and Uwe H Kaufmann.*

HR professionals in today's business environment are required to be strategic business partners - a "voice of conscience" to CEOs and a champion for employees.

HR practitioners with a background in proven management practices such as Lean Six Sigma or Kaizen have a clear advantage in becoming successful.

Having knowledge and exposure in cost-and-time estimates, analytical thinking processes, fact-based strategy and decision-making will open doors.

Understanding and using statistics will help raise the bar in legal compliance relating to people management, recruiting, retention, performance management, job design and human resource information systems.

Lean Six Sigma can provide a framework for HR to confidently present a business case for HR strategies and interventions with a compelling return-on-investment. This will also help the HR professional gain respect from their peers.

### Understanding Lean Six Sigma and metric design

Today, CEOs and senior business managers demand HR metrics that record the impact of HR activities or performance. But few HR professionals have confidence their measurement systems will provide line manager information they need to make critical workforce decisions. Often their metrics are not linked to the company strategy and are unsuitable for improving overall business performance.

Therefore, it is important to distinguish which metrics truly add value to the organisation. Measuring for measurement sake is time-consuming.

Familiarising oneself with strategic initiatives is the key to measuring HR processes such as performance training, recruitment, succession planning, job descriptions/profiling and employee orientation.

Here are a few simple Lean Six Sigma tools to help translate your organisation's needs into metrics leading to improved business results.

### **Voice of the Customer (VOC)**

This is a structured multi-step process focused on capturing the voices of HR's customers - leaders and employees in your organisation - and translating them into CTQs (critical to quality), metrics and actions.

After collecting VOCs from CEOs and senior business managers, the most common request is having HR to speak in business language, instead of requesting the business to understand HR jargon. Similarly, they want time accurate information to run the business well.

### **The Kano diagram**

A simple tool used to prioritise internal customer needs. Firstly, they expect a few "must-haves". Dissatisfaction is inevitable when employees' obvious must-haves are not delivered. Some examples include: "Always provide information before I hear it from others", "Do it right the first time" and "Make it easy to understand for everyone".

VOC and Kano are an extension of what many organisations already do: capturing employee satisfaction. Unfortunately, not everybody plays by the rules. They often draw conclusions on high-level data without identifying the root causes. The result is often sobering.

Internal benchmarking is a field that numerous HR professionals recognise. It involves the process of comparing operations or departments within an organisation. Metrics drawn from CTQs can assist in benchmarking an organisation on their internal customer satisfaction.

### **Process mapping**

A value-added analysis that maps out suppliers, inputs, process steps, outputs and customers (SIPOC) of a process. The benefit of a SIPOC is the high-level understanding of the process and the definition of process metrics that lead to CTQ metrics. A straightforward example should show the effect of process mapping.

A recruitment process map could identify why recruitment takes so long. After studying the typical process for each step, it might be obvious the "short-listing process" consumed a considerable portion of the total processing time.

Why? Digging into the details of this process, the team may have found that one of its HR officers performs in batches, meaning they kept all the recruitment files until the end of the week and tried to complete them on Friday. If the workload was too much, they kept the remaining files until the following Friday.

These problems are easy to resolve once the cause has been identified. However, resolving the issue is only part of the task. The other - sometimes even more important part of the task - is promoting solutions without blaming people and encouraging cross-company learning. HR professionals can help by establishing and supporting good practices in communication linked to any HR systems. To be successful, organisations must implement a culture that promotes and rewards the sharing of ideas.

### **Building a Lean Six Sigma competency model**

Offering to build a Lean Six Sigma competency model, for example, will not only serve to identify candidly the right mix of technical and leadership skills, but allow HR professionals to work closely with the process excellence team.

This helps develop management and leadership competencies of the Lean Six Sigma Green Belts, Black Belts and Master Black Belts. These belts often signify the best personnel and top talent in the organisation.

Our Lean Six Sigma competency model includes four major roles - business advocate, change agent, process excellence expert and integrator/enabler. Together with the relevant competencies, these roles ought to form part of every company's leadership profile. Take the role of business advocate for example. This role is relevant to business understanding and organisational strategies and it requires competencies such as:

- Strategic and organisational awareness.
- Business orientation.
- Strategy deployment capabilities.
- Skills to manage complexity.

HR professionals also have the opportunity to utilise skills such as change management and leadership development. Acting as a resource and/or coach for Black Belts, who encounter team-related problems, adds to their credibility. Sometimes, the HR professional is also positioned better to function as a liaison with the sponsor or champion of the cause than the project manager.

### **Managing Change**

One of the four key roles of HR for an organisation is facilitating and managing change. Introducing Lean Six Sigma into an organisation means major changes that will have a profound effect on a broad group of stakeholders.

Managers and employees at many levels of the organisation will be asked to engage in new behaviours. HR professionals can be champions in making change happen by owning the change process, customising the model and guiding the business through the change process. HR professionals can help businesses meet their objectives quickly by taking the following steps:

1. Identify key success factors for building capacity for change.
2. Provide the extent to which these key success factors are being managed.
3. Identify the improvement activities for each success factor.
4. See the review of the key factors as an iterative process, not an event.

### **Conclusion**

Identifying requirements and gaps, analysing and improving processes, as well as measuring the performance term to sustain gains, applies to all business processes, including HR. Moreover, HR professionals with knowledge of Lean Six Sigma tools and methodologies can deliver better service to customers, their leaders and colleagues.

Developing recruitment and retention strategies for Lean Six Sigma personnel, creating job descriptions and recognition programmes, along with leadership development, are only some of the ways to become

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