

# FORGET YOUR SIXTH SENSE, SIX SIGMA CAN TAKE CARE OF BUSINESS!

Knowledge of **Lean Six Sigma** can enable the modern human resources professional to become an integral part of their organisation, as well as increase the efficiency of their processes.

**H**R professionals in today's business environment are required to be **strategic business partners** – a 'voice of conscience' to their CEOs and a champion for their employees. HR practitioners with a background in proven management practices, such as **Lean Six Sigma** or **Kaizen**, have a great advantage in becoming successful. Having knowledge of, and exposure to, cost and time estimates, analytical thinking processes, fact-based strategies 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 Resources Information System (HRIS).

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 among 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 on business performance. But few HR professionals have confidence that their measurement systems will provide line managers with the information they need to make critical workforce decisions. Often their metrics are not linked to corporate 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 the sake of measurement is time-consuming. Familiarising oneself with strategic initiatives is the **key** to measuring HR processes such as performance reviews, 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 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 for HR to talk using business language, instead of expecting the business to understand HR jargon. Similarly, they want **timely and accurate** information to run the business well.

## The Kano Diagram

A simple tool used to prioritise internal customer needs. Firstly, customers expect a few '**must-haves**'. Dissatisfac-

tion is inevitable when employees' obvious must-haves are not delivered. Some examples of must-haves 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 extensions of what many organisations already do, that is, capture employee satisfaction. Unfortunately, not everybody plays by the rules. They often draw conclusions from high-level data without looking at the root causes. The result is often sobering.

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

## Process Mapping

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

A recruitment process map could identify why recruitment takes so long. After studying the typical processing time each step took, it might be obvious that the 'short-listing process' consumed a considerable portion of the entire processing time. Digging into the details of this process, the team may find that one of its HR officers performed batching, meaning they kept all the recruitment files until the end of the week and tried to complete them every 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 best practices in communication** linked to any HR systems. To be successful, organisations must implement a process that promotes and rewards the sharing of ideas.

## A Lean Six Sigma Competency Model

Offering to build a Lean Six Sigma Competency Model, for example, will not only serve to identify candidates with the right mix of technical and leadership skills, but allow HR professionals to work closely with the process excellence team. This helps develop the **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 be part of every company's leadership profile. The role of business advocate, for example, is relevant to business understanding and organisational strategies, and requires competencies such as:

- Strategic awareness, as well as organisational awareness.
- Business orientation.
- Strategy deployment capabilities.
- Skills to manage complexity.

HR professionals now 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 will help to build credibility. Sometimes, the HR professional is also positioned better to function as a liaison with the sponsor, as well as champion the cause, than the project manager.

## Managing Change

One of the four key roles of HR 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 change model and guiding the business through the change process. HR professionals can help businesses **meet new 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, and measuring long-term performance to sustain gains apply to all business processes, including HR. Moreover, HR professionals, with the 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 reward and recognition programmes, along with leadership development, are only some of the ways to become involved.

Lean Six Sigma can provide a **framework for HR** to confidently present a business case for strategies and interventions with a compelling return on investment, and this will help the profession gain respect among its peers.



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