

Innovatively Leveraging on Six Sigma Framework

The Marriage between Innovation and Six Sigma

By Hector Ramos

Some time ago, I was facilitating a Six Sigma project group involved in solving a process challenge. This group had been working on defining the parameters regarding recruitment policies. This included the allocation of cubicle, phone number, password, printing of name cards, email, pass card, etc for the new hires. The process involved seven people, taking about five months to complete. The team had dutifully performed all the analysis required, used the necessary tools and come up with detailed process delays corresponding to different positions to be delivered to the new hires. It all pointed out to be a 'people problem'. "If Mr X and Mrs Y did their job properly we would not have any delays" was the assumed concluded answer to all the problems.

As I am fortunately NOT an expert in Six Sigma I went in to facilitate the team in the improvement phase 'with fresh eyes'. My clear intention was to map the whole picture from an innovative perspective. So we launched into a future scenario. The team started daydreaming: "Wouldn't it be great if... ?" Forty ideas or pictures of an ideal state came forth. By clustering and analysing we noticed that there were mainly 7 crucial points to look into for possible solutions. It was not a matter of generating many options outside of scope but a few elegant solutions that would solve the underlying issues regarding recruitment policies.

Many thanks for coming by to guide us and pushing for "ownership" and "better communication" of our processes. We all found the session most helpful and the light at the end of the tunnel seems a lot nearer for us now.

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During a session of skilful questioning regarding process delays the previous Six Sigma work proved essential for the development of the solution. At the formulation of the questions, the members were quickly reaching into their notebooks and bringing up detailed and sufficient data to identify points of leverage. The main issue turned out to be lacking data on behalf of the new employee at the date of the signing. A simple change to make compulsory the submission of that data before the signature of contract

was an elegant solution to solve most of the challenges. It was not a people problem after all.

This is just a simple example of how an innovative approach to the improvement phase can leverage on Six Sigma. Six Sigma provides a strong framework for employees and manager to improve processes. However, there is still a need for different perspectives (contextual thinking) and innovative clarification (strategic thinking). These skills are acquired over time through training, facilitation and application of innovative thinking tools and principles. A sound training in this field will provide great value to Six Sigma teams.

About the Author

Hector Ramos is a Practice Partner of Centre for Organisational Effectiveness Pte Ltd based in Singapore. He holds a Master of Science degree in Creative Studies and Change Leadership by the University of New York, USA. Hector offers training in creative thinking to enable groups to discover and leverage on their innovative potential and abilities. Hector can be contacted at Hector.Ramos@COE-Partners.com.