

Synopsis – Chapter 2

What is new about Six Sigma ?

Quality of products & services has evolved over past sixty years.

In 1950s, a whole host of *sampling plans* were developed towards quality control.

1960s brought up the concept of *zero defects*. It stated that if workers could only dedicate themselves to zero defects, the quality would rise.

In 1970s, based on teams tackling daily line problems, *quality circles* achieved some success in Japan.

In 1980s, American companies started giving lot of importance to *statistical process control & control charts* in follow through to Japan's quality success.

In 1990s, a whole plethora of quality standards such as *ISO 9000, QS 9000 & ISO 14000* spawned all over the world.

Many people think that Six Sigma management is an “old wine in new bottle”. This notion is both false & true. It is false for several reasons :

It is false because Six Sigma projects are far more structured & formatted than projects in most previous Quality management processes

It is false because Six Sigma management provides metrics for discussing the quality of processes for understanding process improvements.

It is false because Six Sigma is very focused on impacting the bottom as well as top line of an organisation & it has a specific method for accomplishing this objective. Most other quality management approaches do not have such a clear financial focus

It is false because Six Sigma is focused on rapid & breakthrough improvement, while most other quality management processes work towards incremental improvement.

It is false because past quality management efforts were initially spurred on by quality professionals, consultants or academics, while Six Sigma is being promoted by executive managers.

It is false because, Six Sigma is facilitated by an infrastructure of Six Sigma experts overlaying the organisational structure. Expert facilitation of teams is a big leap forward in rapid process improvement.

On the other hand, it is true because most of the tools, methods & theories were drawn from the quality management predecessors of Six Sigma.

Six Sigma is a relatively new concept as compared to TQM & when it was conceptualised, it was not intended to be a replacement of TQM. Both Six Sigma & TQM have many similarities & are compatible in varied business environment. However, Six Sigma can deliver sharper results than TQM for following reasons :

Six Sigma organisations put process management, improvements & measurements into action as part of the daily responsibilities.

Leaders of Six Sigma organisations have passion for & believe that Six Sigma is synonymous with constant reinvention of the business

A clear goal is the centrepiece of Six Sigma. It is an extremely challenging goal, but still believable. While the goal may change over time, the closed loop Six Sigma system helps the organisation to adjust.

Successful Six Sigma organisations see Six Sigma as a tool to bust silos & eliminate rework created by disconnects & miscommunication.

Six Sigma recognises that both small improvements & major changes can be carried out simultaneously & are an essential part of the survival process.

Six Sigma companies set very demanding standards for learning & back them up with the necessary investments in time & money.

Six Sigma works in service & transactional processes & offers more opportunities than in manufacturing. Six Sigma, thus, has the potential to be more “total” than Total Quality Management.