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Six Sigma in the UK service organisations: results from a pilot survey

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Abstract *Six Sigma is now increasingly applied to a variety of processes ranging from manufacturing to service and variegated transactional processes. Six Sigma has been proved to be a rigorous pursuit of the reduction of process variation and defect rate in all critical business processes to achieve breakthrough improvements in process performance that generates significant savings to the bottom line of an organisation. The paper begins with a simple comparative study between manufacturing and service processes from the Six Sigma application perspective. The paper then presents the results of a pilot survey carried out in the UK service organisations to understand the status of Six Sigma. The paper finally reports the essential ingredients which are required for the successful deployment of Six Sigma in the service sector.*

Introduction

The popularity of Six Sigma as a means of improving the quality of service and customer satisfaction is growing exponentially in the last couple of years in the UK service industry. Six Sigma offers a disciplined approach to improve service effectiveness (i.e. meeting the desirable attributes of a service) and service efficiency (i.e. time and costs). Six Sigma is the relentless and rigorous pursuit of the reduction of non-value added activities and variation in core service processes to achieve continuous and breakthrough improvements in service performance that impact the bottom line results of an organisation. The focus is not on counting the defects in processes, but, rather on the number of opportunities that could result in defects (Antony and Banuelas, 2001). In other words, we need to clearly define the ways a service could fail prior to determining the sigma quality level (SQL) of the given service process. A defect in the context of Six Sigma is defined as “anything that does not meet the customer requirements” (Adams *et al.*, 2003). For example, in a call centre, the following opportunities could result in defects which ultimately cause customer dissatisfaction and hence lost customers:

- the accuracy of information provided by the CSR to the customer;
- the number of abandoned calls;
- the waiting time to get hold of an available CSR;
- the manner in which the customer is greeted by the CSR;
- time taken to resolve the problem once the data are entered in the system;
- time taken to send out the requested follow-up material;
- politeness, eagerness to help the customer on the other end of the telephone line; and
- the manner in which the call is ended, etc.

