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Six Sigma Topic Question:

In our company, it seems that only the people who are participating on our Six Sigma teams know what is going on within the program. How can our organization ensure that employees outside the teams have a clear idea of what is being worked on and what the results are?

A solid communication plan is imperative for any organization that wishes to capitalize on Six Sigma, or any other change initiative for that matter. However, it is all too common to hear this kind of feedback: Only the inner circle of Quality knows what is going on with the Six Sigma initiative. Here are some ideas that can be used as components of any communication plan.

Use every opportunity available to spread the word about Six Sigma and how it is contributing to the company. The more people who know about the initiative, the more likely it is to succeed. One option is to start an E-zine or an electronic magazine to disseminate information throughout the company. Basically, it is an email that contains teasers (brief outlines) of stories or information, which are hyperlinked to the full articles. The articles can include information on project starts, completions, lessons learned, tips, tools, etc. You can easily circulate this kind of communication to everyone in the company (with email access) on a regular basis with limited cost.

You could also do the same thing in print format as a standard newsletter or in the company paper (if one exists). The same ideas as the E-zine apply but the full article would be in the publication. There is usually a significant cost associated with the production of these publications.

Every company that is utilizing Six Sigma should have some kind of internal web presence. As in the case of the E-zine, the site can be used to hold information about past, present and proposed projects. Search functionality should be considered a must. People often duplicate project effort simply because they had no way of searching for existing information. A great addition to the site might be dashboards for your individual projects or your quality initiative as a whole. You can graphically depict your status against projections or commitments as well as calculating a running benefits-to-date counter.

What about a "wall of fame"? In a prominent location, like a lunchroom or busy hallway, display current and completed project information on a corkboard. This raises the visibility of individuals and provides a great reinforcement that the company is serious about recognizing people's efforts.

Regular Six Sigma and leadership reviews are essential. There should be regular Business Quality Council (BQC) meetings to review projects both ongoing and proposed. Quarterly executive reviews should also be performed. In both cases, project leaders should be presenting their projects to the company in evidence of the improvement effort

taking place in the business as well as the personal investment people are making through the Six Sigma initiative. These meetings can be a great way to showcase the winning efforts of your Green and Black Belts.

Consider having regular “Feel the Quality” nights. Once a month or so, bring in pizza or go out for some wings but use the gathering as a way of recognizing project completions and so forth. You might want to treat the event as an official graduation ceremony for belt certifications and/or a “thanks to team members” event.

As a rule, make sure there is some kind of formal rewards and recognition system in the company. This system should be as visible as any other recognition in the company. If your giving away trips to salespeople you should be rewarding the people taking cost out of your business as well.

Finally, we often forget that every improvement initiative will have its share of incomplete projects for any number of reasons. Make sure you include “valiant efforts” with your attempts to raise the awareness of the benefits. Sure everyone wants to hear about the wins but, we learn an awful lot from the losses and it is imperative that we foster an atmosphere where people are willing to fail from time to time. Besides, someone else might want to try and pick up where another left off.

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