



Trends

Using dashboards to enable Six Sigma

By Lyndsay Wise, Chief Analyst, Wise Analytics

Six Sigma is synonymous with continuous process improvements and ensuring a very limited number of defects or inefficiencies within an organization's overall production and/or processes. By using defined methodologies, organizations can manage and ensure high levels of quality. Many companies, especially large manufacturers have used Six Sigma for years to ensure quality within their supply chain and overall product design. However, the focus on developing higher levels of quality through process management and extensive controls extends beyond manufacturing towards overall business process improvements.

For organizations that do look to Six Sigma for their ongoing quality and process improvement initiatives, deploying a dashboard to set targets and monitor results can help improve the overall efficiencies of Six Sigma initiatives. This article identifies the benefits of using dashboards along with an organization's Six Sigma initiative to enable better process controls and to help organizations proactively manage these initiatives while building relationships through collaboration.

The benefits of monitoring six sigma using dashboards

Dashboard use benefits organizations in two key ways. First, dashboards provide a broad view of how the organization is performing and meeting overall targets. Second, organizations can define specific targets that are aligned with the organization's strategic goals and set KPIs that support overall goals across the organization. This second application is where organizations using dashboards to manage Six Sigma initiatives benefit. The ability to align defined goals to overall quality enables organizations to retain their competitive advantage in a fast changing environment.

Operational or continuous metrics monitoring takes the benefits of dashboards one step further. With operational monitoring, organizations can update information intra daily and identify how performance is coming along mid-process as opposed to once daily or after a process is complete. For instance, manufacturers can identify success levels of parts creation over time or within the overall process by measuring completion rates at specific intervals. This allows them to identify discrepancies over time and enables them to identify potential quality issues proactively. Therefore, inadequate processes or general defects can be detected and acted upon immediately as opposed to having to wait for several days until each task is broken down within the ineffective process

Choosing the right dashboard

Once the benefits of dashboards are defined, it becomes important to understand what options exist. Within dashboards there are two general options regarding how to deploy dashboards. One is through a web-based interface whereby end users can log in and access their dashboards and analyze their data via a Web browser. The other is by having the dashboard located on the desktop. Web-based dashboards enable end users to access information through a centralized portal, and share that information across the organization. End users can navigate through multiple layers of data. Desktop dashboards' strength lies in disseminating operational data to multiple end users giving them the ability to monitor performance while performing their daily tasks.

Although both can benefit the organization, for Six Sigma initiatives, the concept of having a dashboard on the desktop where it occupies a limited amount of screen real estate but where it enables companies to constantly monitor the progress of their metrics may provide an extra advantage.

Linking process to people

In some cases, initiatives that focus on process improvement, increasing profits, etc. can overlook the people involved in making these happen. Therefore, it becomes essential for the organization to integrate these initiatives in to the overall goals and daily tasks of employees. By using dashboards, and in this case specifically, desktop dashboards; organizations can link process and people. Through collaboration, end users across the organization can work together to increase operational efficiencies through the use of their dashboards. Information can be disseminated and shared instantaneously and continuously to ensure that potential defects or performance inefficiencies are not overlooked.

Overall considerations

The more KPIs are aligned with an organization's overall goals, the more likely the dashboard monitoring these metrics will be a valuable asset to the business. In today's fast paced environment, simply monitoring overall performance is not enough. When it comes to identifying quality levels, it becomes even more important to identify significant performance metrics and to tie those into quality driven activities. This means identifying the cause and effect relationships, interrelationships between departments, processes and people, assigned responsibilities, etc. Dashboard use that enables these activities can help define roles and responsibilities, metrics and how to use metrics to improve overall performance.

What this means is that simply using a dashboard isn't enough. It is what an organization does with it that counts. To properly get technology and process improvement methodologies working together it is essential to utilize dashboards as an integral part of the organization's Six Sigma initiative.

About the Author:

Lyndsay Wise is the president and founder of WiseAnalytics, an independent analyst firm focusing on the areas of business intelligence and business performance management. For more than eight years, she has assisted clients in business systems analysis, software selection and implementation of enterprise applications. She is a monthly columnist for B-eye-Network, DashboardInsight and writes reviews of leading technologies, products and vendors in business intelligence, business performance management, marketing performance management and customer data integration.

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