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## 'Six Sigma could change the world'

18 Sep 2009, 07:25 hrs IST, Arati Menon Carroll, ET Bureau

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Pradeep Deshpande

It's not everyday that you can take a statistical methodology used for continuous improvement and apply it to solve an unwieldy 60 year-old political conflict. But if Pradeep Deshpande, president [Six Sigma](#) & Advanced Control, had his way, he'd use Six Sigma to resolve the Kashmir conflict and bring about regional prosperity. He's even mailed a proposal to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton outlining a formal methodology, and is confident she will express interest sooner than later.

That isn't the only seemingly unconventional use of Six Sigma, according to Deshpande who is also Professor Emeritus of Chemical Engineering at University of Louisville. His 'theory of national competitiveness' using Six Sigma, he says, predicted India's rise as far back as 1990. "I made a few [presentations](#) to that effect in Pune in 1993, and people said, "You must be joking. India has all kinds of problems'. But nobody is laughing now," he says. His theory of rise and decline proposes that rise and decline are natural phenomena, but one can apply the Six Sigma approach to cultures by using lessons learned from the rise and fall of past cultures. "I project that the candidates for the next rise after the decline of China and India are Greece, Egypt, and Iran," he adds.

Six Sigma, as pioneered by Motorola, states that all activities must be operated in the best possible manner, generating the least possible defects reflective of customer dissatisfaction. In the late nineties though, Deshpande articulated three natural laws that offered clarity to the explanation of Six Sigma without using any equations, and with very little jargon. Also, being a chemical engineer, he's constantly working on extending its applicability beyond static business processes to dynamic and non-linear [systems](#). When his ideas are combined with those developed at Motorola, it becomes possible to apply Six Sigma to any repetitive activity. "Six Sigma is really for life itself," he says.

Deshpande founded SAC in the early nineties to offer Six Sigma and advanced process control training and consulting services. He also believes he might be the first [educator](#) to introduce Six Sigma modules in engineering and MBA programs. An author of six books and currently working on his new text Six Sigma for Karma Capitalism, he is never short of ideas. He recently guided a group of doctors, professors, and others in a study on how Six Sigma could be applied to the yogic system of Pranayam.

The most interesting case study Deshpande offers though is his study of the Gamarra community in the La Victoria township of Lima, Peru, a semi-literate textile and tailoring conglomerate. Gamarra has 25,000 businesses that employ 100,000 workers, generating \$1.2 billion in revenue. These businesses import fabric from several countries and produce textile products for sale nationally and abroad. Just like Mumbai's dabbawalas, many of the folks at Gamarra are semi-literate and do not know what Six Sigma is, but they are extremely passionate and committed to customer satisfaction. "Dabbawalas have been operating their processes for over one hundred years and it has taken them decades, and a considerable amount of trial and error, to deliver such high [performance](#) levels. Similarly, it has taken Gamarra several decades to come to where they are today in terms of performance," says Deshpande.

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Gamarra [entrepreneurs](#) are renowned and widely respected among both business customers and end-use consumers. Their text are know quality and low cost. They are also widely respected for ontime delivery. The entrepreneurs compete fiercely among themselves but they also cooperate when they need to. Each [business](#) is set up to fulfil a certain minimum number of orders but through agreements with other businesses in Gamarra, they have the capacity to solicit and execute orders virtually of any size within the overall capacity constraints of the total workforce. This arrangement assures B-to-B customers of not only high quality but also a quick turnaround. "When a business is found to be delivering very high levels of customer satisfaction, they are necessarily following Six Sigma," explains Deshpande.

For Deshpande, [Six Sigma](#) has its roots in Motorolas's operational initiatives but it also converges with the metaphysical and the spiritual. His journey has taken him through the work of Stephen Hawkins and the wisdom of Swami Ramdev, the founder of pranayam (his book A Small Step For Man is dedicated to them) to create a process for organisational and personal [development](#). "Isn't that funny because one is devoted to the search for zero and the other the search for infinity," he laughs.

Deshpande, like his hero Jack Welch, is a Six Sigma evangelist, but admits that quality movements come and go. They were all borne out of the statistical process control idea as imparted by Edward Deming, he says, so whether it's the Toyota Way or Kaizen, it's all pretty much the same — a drive for business excellence. "As the Rig Veda says: reality is one, the wise call it many names," he explains.

He talks of companies that have made Six Sigma an unwavering part of their business culture. "I have two Lexus, and I didn't take either for a test drive because there is no question of defects," he says. The Toyota luxury car famously stands head and shoulders above other car [manufacturers](#) in customer satisfaction and retention. Plus, it accounts for 2% of Toyota's sales but 33% of its profits. "In the old days people were content with average performance. In the new era companies must focus on low variability," he says. And then he adds quickly, "Why limit it to companies, why not yoga, ayurveda, even homeopathy? Anything is possible."

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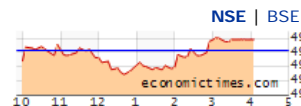
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