

'India should use 6 Sigma to catch up with the world'

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NEW DELHI : "India is missing a big-time opportunity. It is not leveraging its biggest strength — the brilliant minds of its people — on problem solving capabilities. India should create a centre for excellence which would enable it to spearhead Six Sigma everywhere from SMEs to improving water levels in the country. What are you guys doing to spread awareness about the quality crisis in the country?" That's Mikel Harry at his evangelical best on the sidelines of the *Indiatimes* Strategy Summit on Six Sigma and Beyond.

He's not too impressed by China either. "They are trying to get into the game. China is 10 years away from world-class quality," he says.

Normally, one would shrug off such talk as rhetoric. Not when it's Harry speaking. This, after all is the guy who wrote the book on Six Sigma. Literally. But first, what is Six Sigma? A working definition: a strategy that seeks to identify and eliminate causes of errors or defects in business processes by focusing on outputs that are critical to customers.

Does it work? Well, ONGC CMD Subir Raha vouched for it while delivering the keynote address at the Summit.

ONGC began using Six Sigma in R&D three years back. "The cycle time in a testing process used to be 12 days to 120 days. After the first Six Sigma intervention we have come to an average of 24 and I am convinced we can go to well below 10."

Back to Harry. Early in the 1980s, Motorola was steadily losing markets to Japanese companies. The reason was summarised by a salesman at a company meet, "Our quality sucks". Harry, working in a Motorola lab, laid down the basic framework of Six Sigma in a paper which elicited a call from Bob Galvin. "We chatted some, and I signed off by say-

ing, 'Right Bob, don't work too hard'. Later, I realised he was Motorola's chairman. The next time he called, I can assure you my tone was somewhat different."

Those conversations were to lead to a quality movement that began with Motorola, then moved to ABB, DuPont, Allied Signal, GE (where Jack Welch described it as the single most important event during his tenure) and eventually cascaded to almost every leading company in the world.

By now, the success stories are legendary. Like Honeywell saving \$5 billion between 1995 and 2003. But Six Sigma isn't just about cutting costs. Nor is it just about getting to 3.4 defects per million opportunities, as most people understand it, says Harry. "Six Sigma has degraded into a toolkit. But it's really a mindset."

He's candid about its limitations. "Six Sigma is not a panacea. It helps you innovate better, not invent. It's just a better mousetrap which helps bring about higher levels of value with customers and shareholders." But he's also passionate about its benefits. "Six Sigma is a credible journey. TQM is a dream. Dr Deming awakened the world to the need for quality. But he didn't put down a roadmap on getting there. I did. I'm saying with all humility that Six Sigma has proven itself as a superior way of thinking." ■

NOTE FROM SAC:

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation is a client of Six Sigma and Advanced Controls, Inc. ONGC is the largest Corporation in India in terms of Market capitalization and profits.