



Reducing Cycle Time for Six Sigma Projects

By **Tony Jacowski**

This is why every organisation that aspires to achieve Six Sigma quality levels should devise effective plans and strategies that will help in achieving the shortest possible project cycle times.

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Identifying and Eliminating Factors That Result in Long Cycle Times

The actual factors that lead to long cycle times may differ from organisation to organisation, but when you look at statistical data, you can easily see that most projects get extended when:

- There is not enough reliable data related to the selected business process
- There is frequent rescheduling of team meetings and "toll-gate" reviews
- There are changes to be considered in the project scope and objectives
- There is a dramatic shift in management policies and priorities
- There are implementation problems due to employees' attitude towards change

To prevent the occurrence of long cycle times, an organisation first needs to identify the root cause or causes that are most likely to affect the Six Sigma project implementations in the days to come. This requires a high level of understanding about the organisation's business processes, its employees and the policies and strategies of top management.

As such, the organisation should try to create a team made up of experienced employees from every functional department and belonging to different levels of the organisational hierarchy. This team should then be delegated the task of identifying factors that could adversely affect the Six Sigma projects and lead to long cycle times. The team can also be asked to provide input and suggestions that will help in preventing the occurrence of such problems.


Utilising Organisational Resources for Ensuring Shorter Project Cycle Times

The responsibility of completing the project within the stipulated time usually rests with the black belts and project sponsors, making it necessary for them to devise an effective plan of action that does not interfere with the day-to-day functioning of the organisation but gets the job done. Since most Six Sigma project implementations are fairly complex, the black belts and project sponsors are allowed free access to organisational resources such as manpower, funds, or any other resource that they feel is necessary for completing the project within the planned period.

They are also free to seek advice and suggestions from top management when necessary. In most

organisations, this is more than just a formality, because communication between top management and the people actually carrying out the implementations helps in limiting the most common oversights related to the project implementations.

Employee co-operation and support are also vital for achieving shorter project cycle times; and as such, organisations need to ensure that the interests of the employees are not curtailed. It is only when the whole organisation functions as a well-oiled machine, can the black belts and project sponsors hope to reduce cycle times for Six Sigma projects.

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