

BOOK REVIEW

Leading Six Sigma

RONALD D. SNEE AND ROGER W. HOERL, PRENTICE-HALL, 2003.



*By Bill Parr, department of statistics,
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If you're interested in Six Sigma, you should read this book carefully because the authors, both well-known statisticians and consultants, share some key lessons learned from their vast experiences with Six Sigma.

Each author's knowledge gives him the necessary credibility to write this book about Six Sigma deployment. Ronald D. Snee, a principal in Tunnell Consulting's performance excellence practice, has done executive level consulting with more than 30 companies. Roger W. Hoerl has been a leader in General Electric's well-publicized Six Sigma initiative and has been responsible for implementing Six Sigma in a wide variety of GE processes, the bulk of which have been in areas other than manufacturing.

I own more than 12 books about Six Sigma, and if I were forced to discard all but two, this book would be one of the two keepers. (The other keeper would be Forrest Breyfolge III's *Implementing Six Sigma: Smarter Solutions Using Statistical Methods*, second edition, published by John Wiley & Sons in 2003.)

Purpose

The authors' intent is to offer advice in such areas as:

- Identifying a company's most promising Six Sigma opportunities and leaders.
- Providing leadership, talent and infrastructure for a successful launch.

Editor's Note

The "Current Literature" department features information about relevant Six Sigma publications and articles that readers will find useful.

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- Implementing systems, processes and budgets for ongoing Six Sigma projects.
- Measuring and maximizing the financial value of a Six Sigma initiative.

Snee and Hoerl offer a roadmap explaining how to get started, manage the important aspects of the initiative, maintain the momentum over time and eventually scale down the initiative and institutionalize Six Sigma.

Significant Contributions

The authors realize not all companies are as large as Motorola, GE or AlliedSignal/Honeywell. As a result, not all companies can adopt the deployment models used at those three companies.

This viewpoint is a breath of fresh air. In my opinion, too many people are being advised to slavishly imitate GE or whichever company their consultant previously worked with. Organization size, the nature of the industry, existing Six Sigma asset base and culture all powerfully influence which deployment models will be most effective.

Chapter 2, "Four Case Studies: What Works and What Doesn't," is one of the book's major contributions. The account of GE's experience with Six Sigma to date is insightful and adds to what is already widely publicized. The successful experience at W.R. Grace, which began its Six Sigma initiative in 1999, provides an interesting counterpoint to GE because it's a smaller, less public company. The two less successful Six Sigma deployments, one at a chemical company and one at a paper company, provide a contrast in deployment strategies.

The authors summarize factors affecting successful deployment, including committed leadership, use of top talent in Six Sigma roles and an appropriate supporting infrastructure, in Chapter 3, and the list is hardly surprising. However, it leads to good, sound advice.

Here's a list of other important items that make the book worth reading:

- A discussion of how to select projects that can be completed in a reasonable timeframe of four to six months and are tied directly to the bottom line or key customer issues.
- A high level deployment roadmap that looks at the entire Six Sigma process from launch to the institutionalization of Six Sigma methodologies into the way employees do their work.
- A discussion of full vs. partial deployment. Companies that have someone other than the CEO launching their Six Sigma initiative should pay particular attention to this part.
- An outline of executive workshops, project selection, process entitlement and Black Belt (BB) candidate selection will help those interested in deploying Six Sigma. The taxonomy of roles, though hardly new, will help those less familiar with Six Sigma.
- A sample BB course topical outline.
- A discussion on how to manage the effort.
- Lists of communication principles and forms of leadership support.


What's Not Included

I'm relieved the authors chose not to spend substantial time attempting to persuade the reader to deploy Six Sigma. Instead, they focus on how best to deploy Six Sigma and end up making a contribution in an area in which the amount of literature is minimal.

Though statisticians by education, the authors also avoid the fallacy of assuming Six Sigma is primarily about statistical methods and thus something at which statisticians will be instantly competent.

They say that "by reading this book you will learn what works and what doesn't, earn effective deployment strategies and become fluent in the language of Six Sigma." *Leading Six Sigma* delivers that and more. Everyone interested in the deployment of Six Sigma should own this book.

Correction

Implementing Six Sigma: Smarter Solutions Using Statistical Methods, the fourth book on the May 2003 "Six Sigma Bestsellers" list (p. 48), was written by Forrest Breyfogle III and was published this year. 

SIX SIGMA BESTSELLERS*

1. *Rath & Strong's Six Sigma Pocket Guide*, Rath & Strong, 2000.
2. *What Is Six Sigma?* Peter S. Pande, Lawrence Holpp, McGraw-Hill, 2001.
3. *Rath & Strong's Six Sigma Leadership Handbook*, Rath & Strong, 2003.
4. *Six Sigma: The Breakthrough Management Strategy Revolutionizing the World's Top Corporations*, Mikel J. Harry, et al., Doubleday, 1999.
5. *Customer Centered Six Sigma: Linking Customers, Process Improvement and Financial Results*, Earl Naumann and Steven H. Hoisington, ASQ Quality Press, 2001.
6. *The New Six Sigma: A Leader's Guide To Achieving Rapid Business Improvement and Sustainable Results*, Matt Barney and Tom McCarty, Pearson Higher Education, 2002.
7. *Six Sigma Project Management*, Jeffrey N. Lowenthal, ASQ Quality Press, 2002.
8. *Strategic Six Sigma: Best Practices From the Executive Suite*, Dick Smith and Jerry Blakeslee, John Wiley and Sons, 2002.
9. *Lean Six Sigma: Combining Six Sigma Quality With Lean Speed*, Michael L. George, McGraw-Hill, 2002.
10. *Six Sigma for Managers*, Greg Brue, McGraw-Hill, 2002.

*Compiled using data from Amazon.com, ASQ Quality Press and BN.com.