

The phenomenal allure of Six Sigma is tied to two obvious reasons. First, there is the hope of realizing millions of dollars in savings while improving customer satisfaction. What's the source for these millions of dollars in savings? Estimates are that a typical company, operating at three to four sigma, spends between 25 to 40 percent of their gross revenues fixing problems.¹ Second, Six Sigma resonates deeply in the boardroom. It is appealing because its devotees make up a veritable who's who of American business. General Electric, Allied Signal, Johnson & Johnson, Dupont, Motorola, Dow and Raytheon all tout its significant business value.²

Yet, despite its striking relative advantage and apparent boardroom "buy-in," implementation success is far from guaranteed. "It can be wildly successful," says David Fitzpatrick, worldwide leader of Deloitte Consulting's Lean Enterprise Practice, "but I would say fewer than 10% of companies are doing it to the point where it's going to affect the balance sheet and the share price in any meaningful period of time."³ Predictably, despite its rock sturdy business case and piqued executive interest, Six Sigma is susceptible to the same implementation barriers that all major change initiatives face. Yes, the same barriers that cause 70% of major change efforts to sub-optimize – no sustained executive commitment, no leadership alignment, resistance to change, poor communications, no reinforcement, resource problems, etc.

For the Six Sigma context, the critical success factors are these: (a) is it strategically aligned; (b) is there technical competency to apply it; and (c) is there human/cultural acceptance?⁴ Identifying the most likely barrier among the three factors is relatively obvious. The first two are straightforward: *strategic*

alignment – saving money while improving customer satisfaction is always the right thing to do; *technical competency* – the DMAIC tools are proven, practical, and not overly complex. Thus the third factor, *deployment to gain human acceptance and cultural fit*, is thus the likely culprit.

In a recent survey of more than 240 Six Sigma practitioners across industries and around the globe, 90% of the respondents rated "the addition of a structured tool set for engaging frontline managers and employees as a top priority to help improve Six Sigma results."⁵ This need is validated by Mikel

Harry's observation that "it takes between three and five years for Six Sigma to become entrenched in even **the most progressive organizations**."⁶ Clearly, absent a structured implementation approach, the probability of a deployment being on time, on budget, and to specification, is very low.

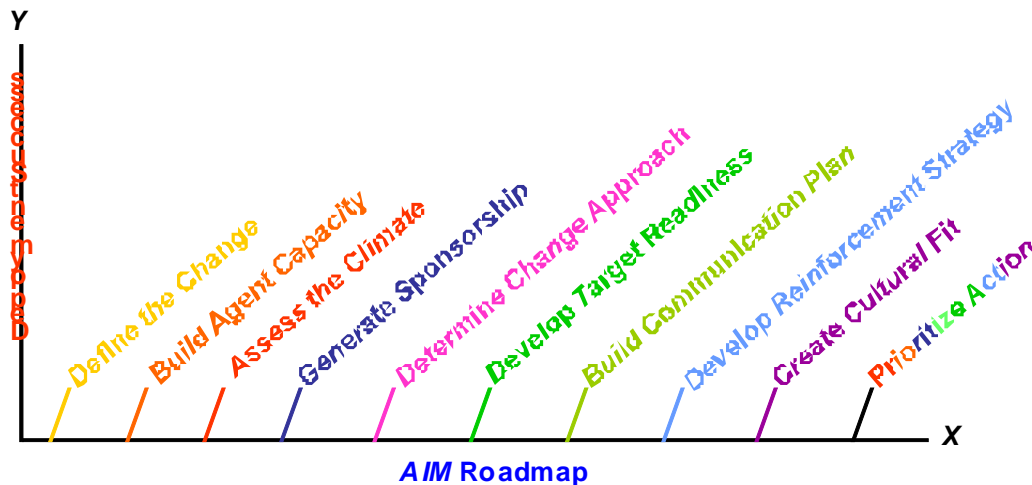
Improving odds for successful implementation is paramount.

Implementation Management Associates, Inc. (IMA) has developed a structured process to do exactly that. The approach is called **Accelerating Implementation Methodology (AIM)**. It is tactical, repeatable, practical, and based on common sense. It includes a set of data-driven tools that measures the particular strengths and weaknesses you will encounter when the Six Sigma initiative is deployed. It also provides the structure to develop strategies and tactics to mitigate implementation barriers and leverage strengths.

The AIM roadmap is depicted below using the familiar $y = f(x)$ notation.

"...fewer than 10% of companies are doing [Six Sigma] to the point where it's going to affect the balance sheet and the share price in any meaningful period of time."

Six Sigma ROI = (f) Deployment Structure



Each step of the roadmap addresses a likely deployment barrier. Assessment tools to collect data as to the causes of the barriers accompany the steps. Further, the steps can be “unbundled” for high leverage execution and speed.

Following are a few examples of key issues that should be considered when applying the roadmap and its tools:

- Define the Change – do you want to “do” Six Sigma or do you want to “be” Six Sigma?
- Assess the Climate – does your implementation history suggest a quality-hostile or quality-friendly environment?
- Generate Sponsorship – are you deploying a purposeful approach to gaining and sustaining widespread and aligned leadership commitment?
- Develop Target Readiness – have you developed a strategy to manage effectively

the inevitable resistance to change at all levels of the organization?

- Create Cultural Fit – does your culture value/reward problem solving to the point of resisting problem prevention?

The potential ROI for a successful Six Sigma effort is staggering. The logic for pursuing a Six Sigma culture is excruciatingly self-evident. Yet the deployment challenge is excruciatingly difficult and complex. On the “hard side” it can demand changes to strategy, structure, operations, and technology. On the “soft side” it is laden with required changes in human and cultural expectations, perceptions, behaviors, and skills. It is immersed in politics, emotion, and resistance. Its deployment is a moving target that requires a perfect **AIM**.

Sources:

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4. Kowalski, Bill. “What Keeps Six Sigma Practitioners Up At Night?” iSixSigma.com.
5. Eckes, George. *Making Six Sigma Last*, John Wiley & Sons, N.Y., 2001, p.2.
6. Harry, Mikel. *Six Sigma*, Double Day, N.Y., 2000, p. 278.