

onesixsigma.com

Six Sigma Interview

with Phil Newell, Program Director
for Technology Products
Six Sigma Qualtec

Six Sigma Interview with Phil Newell from Six Sigma Qualtec

Phil Newell, Program Director for Technology Products,
Six Sigma Qualtec



What does Six Sigma mean to Six Sigma Qualtec?

Six Sigma is an 'enabling tool' for organizations to achieve their business objectives; be it to reduce cost, increase market share or to differentiate themselves from the competition in the market place.

It's one of many tools available; other tools that we find organizations using include Lean Manufacturing and Business Process Management and these can support achievement of these objectives. Despite its powerful capabilities, it should not be considered the objective. Six Sigma is used to enable your corporate strategy by linking to your overall business objectives for real success.

Six Sigma is a means, not an end. It is a tool by which organizations can achieve their business strategies and one which should be used judiciously throughout the company.

What is your remit within the organization?

My responsibility covers all client facing technology products offered by Six Sigma Qualtec. It is primarily a customer facing role; approximately 75% of my working day is spent talking with customers about their challenges and requirements.

Specifically, I distinguish how technology can best be applied to help solve our customers' business problems in and around their performance improvement programs. That being said, it doesn't mean that for every problem there is a technology solution; technology should be applied carefully to solve problems. This is where the systematic process to listen to customers, fully understand the problem, and determine how to best apply technology to help create an overall solution takes precedence. Sometimes it's a small technological piece of assistance other times it's a large piece. Always the focus is enabling the solution, not just more functionality.

Can you expand on what kind of problems these are typically?

I concentrate on the issues customers are facing within their overall performance improvement program, and identify problems from a deployment perspective. These problems typically comprise; difficulties in how to manage a deployment; how to best manage the resources within a deployment; enhancing communication; creating a global community; leveraging best practices; or improving replication opportunities. All of these issues can be categorized under a common umbrella of Deployment Management.

By applying Business Intelligence technology to enhance data-driven decision-making within SixNet, we have improved customers' ability to resolve problems - or remove as much as possible of the impact. The net-result is a deployment which is ultimately managed more efficiently, and produces a bigger Return on Investment

What are some of the key deployment management issues you are hearing from senior management, and how are they addressed through technology?

Within the last nine months, the focus has been on globalization of product and reporting. Global organizations need multiple languages and currencies for their project tracking capabilities, and to be able to mine into the data which is captured by those project tracking technologies. Deployment Managers need this information to be easily accessible in order for responsive data-driven decisions.

It is no longer satisfactory to track basic information such as the number of projects running and forecast versus actual savings. Customers need to compare results between business units, waves of training and categories of project in order to communicate these trends and make adjustments to the format, curriculum, and delivery of the improvement initiative based on the data. For instance, we are working with Royal Dutch Shell to enhance opportunities to leverage knowledge and learnings from within the organization; replication of success, and evasion of setbacks.

Experience has shown there are a couple of key aspects that should be mandatory in any technology solution. It needs to be a web based application, it needs to be accessible from anywhere in the world at any time and it needs to adopt localized parameters (date, time, language etc.). The data surrounding a project also needs to be closely tied together with a holistic collection of data so it's easy to replicate. Through a user-friendly reporting portal, an 'enabling' technology allows customers to create exactly the kind of reporting they need, in order to design what it is they wish to communicate: be it primarily a graphical view that asks questions and provides the answers, or is it more dashboard driven, for instance.

The technology is only a part of it; Business Intelligence is a tool which must be used effectively in order to steer the decision making process. Deployment Management decisions are validated and data-driven, through Business Intelligence. This is what customers were asking for six to nine months ago, and that's what is effectively being delivered right now through SixNet.

Have you recognized any trends in the technology challenges being faced by organizations over the last three years?

Initially, the demand was for technology to help practitioners implement projects by analyzing data or mapping complex processes. There are now however, a vast amount of tools available from the likes of MINITAB and iGrafx which have effectively resolved these implementation problems.

Customers' pain then shifted towards tracking projects. The technology industry surrounding Six Sigma deployments has in fact met these demands over the past two years; there are several capable applications that can track projects now.

The most recent evolution of Six Sigma technology solutions has been primarily to help customers resolve their Deployment Management related problems. This is where SixNet is uniquely positioned to add value to an organization.

Have you recognized geographical trends in the Voice of the Customer?

There are far more "home-grown" systems implemented to track projects in the States. This is because, although the Six Sigma industry in the US was further ahead within the global economy three years ago, there were very few (if any) really good project-tracking tools available. What we are finding, is a propensity for these organizations to now re-evaluate their current systems, as they are not addressing the problems being faced in managing the overall deployment. We are receiving a tremendous amount of interest in integrating the Balanced Scorecard within SixNet in the States, and I would say that it is becoming more of a requirement both in the States and Europe.

Historically in Europe, companies had not realized the need to have project-tracking tools until they were actually available on the commercial market, and so far fewer “home-grown” systems exist today. While organizations looking for technology solutions in Europe are conscious of the value in systematically managing deployments, project tracking remains the focus and is the minimum expectation.

We are also recognizing global trends in the market. Across the globe, companies are moving from buying an enterprise product and installing it with their other IT systems, to choosing a fully hosted ASP solution. We have also seen that the rapid uptake and interest in Six Sigma in Europe, as well as the global spreading of current US deployments, is creating a greater demand for localized language versions.

Gathering Voice of the Customer data has obviously been very useful. How else have you applied the principles of improvement initiatives in your own development of SixNet?

One of the definite advantages of running a technology group within a Six Sigma service provider is that we all can benefit from using a Six Sigma approach to develop the product itself. People do not buy what they do not want; and so the Voice of the Customer is obviously a strategic necessity. We use Quality Function Design to develop solutions and determine what the customer really wants.

We use the Agile Development methodology to develop SixNet, and we have had tremendous success regarding delivery times, budget and quality. It is not just the methodology however that has enabled us to be so successful, it is the building of a very strong team. Agile has some huge benefits but requires that the team members be much stronger than those found in most teams. Any methodology that uses very strong team members increases success. Comparing methodologies with equal team member capabilities demonstrate the real differences between them.

What can customers expect of the next release of SixNet?

Within the last three to six months, the Voice of the Customer is demanding to combine the Business Scorecard at the strategic level - so that the operational excellence programs are now directly linking to their Six Sigma or other performance improvement projects. The maturity of Six Sigma customers is increasing dramatically, and there is significantly more pressure to align strategy with tools and projects. This tight integration of Business Scorecards with Deployment Management and ultimately Project Tracking, allows management to drill down into the project details that are influencing those critical success metrics identified on the Business Scorecard.

onesixsigma.com comment: The voice of the Six Sigma User Group in February this year validates this finding when the group was asked: "What are the key factors that you consider critical to the successful roll out of an enterprise-wide business improvement breakthrough program?"

So if there was a single voice of the customer, it is to select projects based on the goals and objectives of the organization. To that end, the next release of SixNet will include the Business Scorecard feature, and it will be the only technological solution available which fully integrates both necessities.

To find out more about Six Sigma Qualtec's SixNet or to contact Phil Newell, email pnewell@ssqi.com or call +44 1926 314 349

Six Sigma Qualtec
1295 W. Washington Street • Suite 208
Tempe, AZ 85281 • USA
toll free (800) 247-9871
phone (480) 586-2600
email info@ssqi.com