

Rath & Strong's

# Six sigma leadership handbook

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# 23 REPLICATING RESULTS AND MANAGING KNOWLEDGE

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Have you ever implemented a successful pilot only to find that you were unable to roll it out and transfer it to other parts of the company? Have you ever been successful in achieving an objective but failed to sustain the gains afterward? If the answer to these questions is yes, then the idea of Positive Deviance, which is described in this chapter, might be able to help you achieve measurable results that can be sustained and replicated.' Replicating successful Six Sigma projects across the entire organization is crucial to unleashing Six Sigma's full potential. This chapter provides a general framework for replicating results, with an overview of strategies and tactics you will find helpful, including Positive Deviance.

## THE CHALLENGE OF REPLICATION

A simple example can help to illustrate the importance of replication for the overall success of the Six Sigma initiative. In the operation of a chain of several hundred hotels that all provide the same services and are positioned similarly in their respective markets, the process improvements made in one hotel could theoretically be implemented in all the other hotels. But it rarely happens. Why? The lack of successful replication can be traced to several factors:

- *Lack of communication.* Nobody in the organization is aware that the process has been improved.
- *Lack of transferability.* Although the fundamentals of the idea apply everywhere, local nuances make it impossible to simply implement the entire solution.
- *Lack of effective processes and systems to transfer knowledge.* Although the process owners in other locations know that a team has

made some improvements, the lack of effective mechanisms to share the results prevents the adoption of best practices.

- *Lack of trust and incentives to adopt successful best practices.* The not-invented-here phenomenon prevents many companies from adapting successful practices elsewhere.

But be careful: What works brilliantly for one site might sound the death knell for another. And even when the technical solution in the end is absolutely the same, the respect and ownership engendered through the process of discovery by those responsible for adopting the solution is critical to its acceptance and sustainability. It is crucial to show this kind of respect from the very beginning. "You already possess the answer-I need you to guide us" is the guiding principle of the Positive Deviance (PD) approach.

With respect to Six Sigma, PD can help in answering the question: "Do I need to have the costs and delays of a full Six Sigma Black Belt team to replicate solutions at each additional location by going through the entire process, in essence reinventing the wheel, or is there a better way?" The initial solution is usually idiosyncratic, since the team has not been asked to take into consideration the constraints of the rest of the world. PD helps to reduce the limitations of the initial solution. Applied correctly, PD can be a better way to replicate successful ideas. The PD concept applies to organizations with one or multiple solutions and, even more important, helps to address some of the cross-cultural issues involved.

#### POSITIVE DEVIANCE: REPLICATING THE PROCESS, NOT THE OUTCOME

Positive Deviance solves problems requiring social or behavioral change. It is predicated on the belief that "in every community, organization, or social group, there are individuals whose exceptional behaviors or practices enable them to get better results than their neighbors with the exact same resources."

In our experience, the technical elements of the solution, such as process flow changes or adjustments in process settings, account for only half of the results. Any process with human interaction also has an associated behavioral component, which is significant and cannot be overlooked.

The value of the Positive Deviance approach is that it provides a design through which successful Six Sigma projects can be identified as "Positive Deviants" and then amplified. The methodology (see Figure 23.1) uses a fact-based approach to identify what can be replicated and what cannot. The Positive Deviance approach requires those in the organization who could benefit from the improvements made elsewhere to go through a discovery process to determine which aspects of the project can be replicated in their own environment. By involving those who are supposed to implement the best practice in the discovery process, employees develop ownership of the results. Although traditional approaches include discovery as a component, PD offers a structured process to address this fundamental issue.

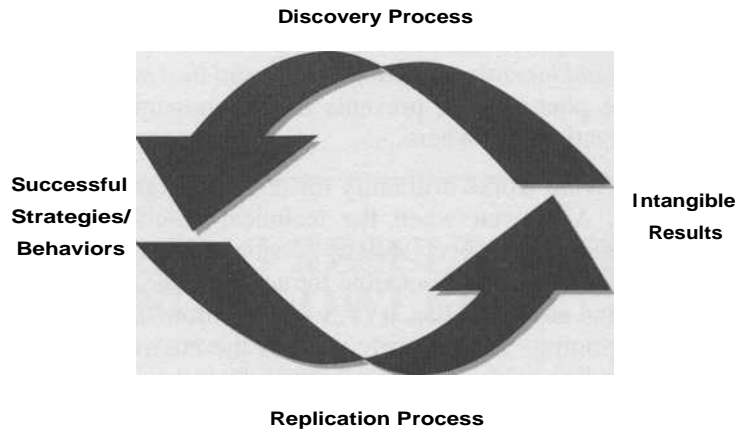


FIGURE 23.1 Achieving results by changing behaviors.

Underlying the Positive Deviance approach is the insight that successful change requires both changing the process of identification and adapting new behaviors. When employees do not discover the answer themselves, they feel no ownership of the externally proposed solution, hence the solution probably will not be sustainable in that environment. By definition, Positive Deviance is a "respectful process," because it is based on the belief that the solution already exists within the community and needs only to be discovered by its members.

Figure 23.2 lists the six steps of the Positive Deviance approach.

DEFINE	What is the problem, the perceived causes, and related behavioral norms? What would a successful solution/outcome look like (described as a behavior or status outcome)?
DETERMINE	Are there any individuals/entities in the community who already exhibit the desired behavior or status?
DISCOVER	What are the unique practices/behaviors that enable these Positive Deviants to outperform/find better solutions to problems in their community?
DESIGN	Design and implement intervention that enables others in the community to access and practice new behaviors (focus on doing rather than transfer of knowledge).
DISCERN	What is the effectiveness of the intervention?
DISSEMINATE	Make intervention accessible to a wider constituency (replication/ scaling up).

FIGURE 23.2 Positive Deviance approach.

Using the Positive Deviance approach, Save the Children, a non-government organization, has helped 204 communities in Vietnam to rehabilitate more than 20,000 malnourished children. Because their approach is based anew on the realities and context of each community, it is by definition "culturally appropriate" and transferable. The Vietnam "Positive Deviance Nutrition Program" has been replicated in twenty-five countries, including Myanmar, Peru, Tanzania, Bolivia, Nepal, Bhutan, Mozambique, Egypt, Bangladesh, Haiti, and most recently, Cambodia.

Positive Deviance focuses on replicating the process, not the solution. A key reason is that solutions are context-specific and contingent on resources, local conditions, politics, and the like, and are therefore not universally adaptable. You cannot transplant a model grown in one soil to another and expect it to flourish. Externally identified solutions might require specific conditions that your business or organization does not offer. Simply transferring the technical solution will not be sufficient.

## **SIX TACTICS FOR REPLICATION**

Using every ounce of learning requires an integrated approach to address both the technical and the organizational side of change. Whether you adopt PD as an approach or not, these six tactics can help you ensure timely replication:

1. Determine the size of the opportunity.
2. Scope for replication.
3. Align goals and incentives.
4. Establish an effective knowledge management system.
5. Develop communities of practice.
6. Establish guidelines for knowledge preservation.

### **Determine the Size of the Opportunity**

if the results of a Six Sigma project were replicated across locations, business units, departments, or manufacturing lines, how much value could be created? The answer to this question often astonishes leadership teams and motivates the skeptics to support replication:

- The human resources director of a large, decentralized manufacturer of drugs realized that the change in the requisition approval process implemented by a team at a remote location could be used across all domestic business units and, if fully implemented, would result in savings of several million dollars.

### **How Positive Deviance Differs from Benchmarking**

Benchmarking and Positive Deviance look quite similar when their objectives are compared: Both seek to identify best practices. However, taking this comparison one step further, the differences between the concepts are immense.

- Where benchmarking tries to identify the best and most effective process or approach, using efficiency and effectiveness as the prime criteria, the PD approach includes successful and accessible behaviors as a key aspect.
- Where benchmarking is aimed at applying the principles and characteristics of an effective process managed by another entity, regardless of its contextual details, the PD approach focuses by design on those very details.
- Where benchmarking focuses on successful ideas and concepts from outside the organization, Positive Deviance looks for them inside. The difference could not be greater: The risk that what works for the benchmarked organization may not work within the context of the external group conducting the study contrasts sharply with the probability that the demonstrably successful behaviors/strategies identified from within (by the PD process) will be accessible to all and thus adaptable. The probability of internally identified best practices being implemented is significantly greater because the not-invented-

Benchmarking has often been criticized for comparing apples with oranges. "Not invented here" is a typical reaction to the so-called best practices that worked fine somewhere else. Although it is quite easy to identify and understand a process that works much better elsewhere, it is most often very difficult to transfer this process and to implement it in a different setting. Organizations are unique, at least in certain aspects. (See Figure 23.3.)

The implementation plans that stem from a benchmarking study normally fail to address all the details that make real organizational life complicated. To have any impact, the implementation concept must address the company-specific business situation and adapt to these requirements. Organizations have different weaknesses and strengths, so they can't be treated the same. This uniqueness is not an obstacle but the necessary condition for survival.

Real benchmarking is a change management skill in itself. Xerox, the pioneer, made benchmarking into something it owns, its unique way of learning from the marketplace. To develop this "product," it took the

	<b>Bench marking</b>	<b>Positive Deviance</b>
<b>FOCUS</b>	External	Internal
<b>CRITERIA</b>	Process performance	Successful behavior
<b>LEVEL OF DETAIL STUDIED</b>	Low	High
<b>DURATION OF STUDY</b>	Short	Ongoing
<b>EASE OF TRANSFER</b>	Low	High
<b>ACCESSIBILITY</b>	Low	High
<b>RISK OF FAILURE</b>	High	Low

FIGURE 23.3 Comparison: benchmarking versus Positive Deviance.

company years of experimentation on what worked for it and what did not. Only through this process of customizing a generic strategy was Xerox able to unleash its inherent potential.

The PD concept focuses instead on successful behavior. And because this search process is limited to a specific surrounding and context and to searching inside the system or organization, whether it be a community in Vietnam or a manufacturer in Western Europe, the approach identifies behavior that leads to success under exactly the same conditions.

All this does not mean that benchmarking can't be a real help when you are trying to redesign processes or replicate results. However, benchmarking is more suited to stimulating thought and generating unconventional ideas. The concept of Positive Deviance works much better when you are looking for implementation and you are trying to achieve measurable results that can be sustained and replicated.

- The director for organizational learning at a large hotel chain estimated the value of replicating the results of the initial 50 Black Belt projects across all hotels in the same market segment at \$100 million.

Getting leaders to understand how much value can be created if they concentrate on replication is the single most powerful thing you can do to awaken a sleeping giant. Organizations such as General Electric, who pride

themselves on being "boundaryless" when it comes to adopting best practices, realized this simple truth a long time ago.

One great advantage Six Sigma provides is that it builds the metrics and data required to determine the size of the opportunities. While, in the past, organizations were often hampered by the lack of such data, those who implement process management are poised to determine how many different processes there are and how many times the same process exists in various parts of the business. Conducting an opportunity assessment under such conditions is relatively easy. With Six Sigma, even when the organization has little data on how many sites use the same process, analyzing the data and providing an estimate takes very little time and effort.

### **Scope for Replication**

It is recommended that potential projects be scoped in a way that allows the team to achieve results in a short time frame. This means that in many instances, the first assault on the process focuses on a single site. An environment where the same process is used in multiple sites needs a cost-effective process to rapidly replicate the results of the first project. Yet inherent local variations must be accommodated, and the involvement of stakeholders is critical to successful implementation and sustained results. Simply dictating that subsequent sites implement another site's approach will not work.

### **Align Goals and Incentives**

Even if the leadership team realizes the extent of the opportunity to share the results of Six Sigma projects, how to create an incentive for those who could benefit from adopting the new way of doing things still remains a question. Some organizations evaluate the replication potential of each project and use this information to provide an incentive for local managers to adopt the new process; others simply go ahead with tasking the leader of the local site to implement what worked elsewhere. It is recommended that you consider a balanced strategy, where you track the replication potential centrally and provide this information to those who need it while asking all business unit leaders to report on how they used the ideas and improvements created in other units to their own advantage. Using a "steal ideas shamelessly" (SIS) index, the organization can measure who leads in terms of adopting the work of others.

### **Establish an Effective Knowledge Management System**

Unless you have a centralized system that allows you to keep track of all the projects and that allows everybody in the organization to identify successful ideas they can adopt in their own areas of responsibility, you will have a difficult time communicating what is possible. Many organizations limit access to a selected group of people to avoid potential leaks. This fear is somewhat

legitimate. However, the same is true for many other organizational documents: A strategy is useless if nobody knows it, but telling everybody creates a risk that is often unacceptable. Therefore, many companies adopt a system with multiple layers that allows everybody to see the high-level project information but provides detailed information only for those who can and should use it to implement similar improvements in their own area.

### **Develop Communities of Practice**

Systems can do only so much-at the end of the day, success depends on people talking to each other. Having forums where those involved in managing and improving the process can exchange ideas and results is important to spreading best practices across the organization. Using a regular Black Belt or process owner forum is a good idea, since face-to-face interaction creates more value than an electronic chat room. Creating and nurturing these communities is a leadership task: Functional leaders need to play an active role in sponsoring individual forums.

### **Establish Guidelines for Knowledge Preservation**

The documentation of Six Sigma projects can serve as a road map for replicating the results elsewhere. By defining guidelines for preparing documentation, the leadership team can ensure that the Six Sigma team considers how to effectively communicate what a process owner elsewhere could do to accomplish similar results.

## **CONCLUSION**

The importance of replication is paramount. The challenge for business leaders is to create an integrated approach that helps realize the gains available from implementing best practices. Positive Deviance provides a framework that can help an organization avoid the typical pitfalls involved in implementing best practices by ensuring that the practices are not only best, but (equally important) adaptable. An effective system for managing knowledge can help the organization identify local solutions that can be replicated across the organization.