

REACHING STRATEGIC EDGE

Question 1

State with reasons the following statement is correct / incorrect:

The main focus of six sigma is on the shareholders.

(2 Marks) (May, 2007)

Answer

Incorrect: Although any business action may result directly or indirectly in creation/erosion of shareholders wealth, the main focus of six sigma is on delivering value to the customers. Six sigma aims in improving customer satisfaction. Primarily, six sigma means maintenance of the desired quality in processes and end products. It also means taking systematic and integrated efforts toward improving quality and reducing cost.

Question 2

Briefly answer the following question in 2-3 sentences:

Define T.Q.M.

(2 Marks) (Nov., 2007)

Answer

Total Quality Management: TQM or Total Quality Management is a people-focused management system that aims at continual increase in customer satisfaction at continually lower real cost. There is a sustained management commitment to quality and everyone in the organisation and the supply chain is responsible for preventing rather than detecting defects.

TQM is a total system approach (not a separate area or program) and an integral part of high-level strategy. It works horizontally across functions and departments, involves all employees, top to bottom, and extends backward and forward to include the supply chain and the customer chain. TQM stresses learning and adaptation to continual change as keys to organizational success.

Question 3

What is Benchmarking? Explain briefly the elements involved in Benchmarking process.

(3 + 7 = 10 Marks) (Nov., 2008)

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Answer

Benchmarking is an approach of setting goals and measuring productivity based on best industry practices. It developed out of need to have information against which performance can be measured. Benchmarking helps businesses in improving performance by learning from the best practices and the processes by which they are achieved. Thus, benchmarking is a process of continuous improvement in search for competitive advantage. It measures company's products, services and practices against those of its competitors or other acknowledged leaders in the industry.

The Benchmarking Process

Some of the common elements of benchmarking process are as under:

- (i) **Identifying the need for benchmarking:** This step will define the objectives of the benchmarking exercise. It will also involve selecting the type of benchmarking. Organizations identify realistic opportunities for improvements.
- (ii) **Clearly understanding existing decisions processes:** The step will involve compiling information and data on performance.
- (iii) **Identify best processes:** Within the selected framework best processes are identified. These may be within the same organization or external to them.
- (iv) **Comparison of own process and performance with that of others:** Benchmarking process also involves comparison of performance of the organization with performance of other organization. Any deviation between the two is analysed to make further improvements.
- (v) **Prepare a report and implement the steps necessary to close the performance gap:** A report on benchmarking initiatives containing recommendations is prepared. Such a report also contains the action plans for implementation.
- (vi) **Evaluation:** Business organizations evaluate the results of the benchmarking process in terms of improvements vis-à-vis objectives and other criteria set for the purpose. It also periodically evaluates and reset the benchmarks in the light of changes in the conditions that impact the performance.

Question 4

Define each of the following and analyse its role in strategic implementation:

- (1) *B.P.R.*
- (2) *ERP*
- (3) *Benchmarking*
- (4) *Value chain.*

(4 × 2½ = 10 Marks) (May, 2007)

Answer

- (1) **BPR:** BPR stands for business process reengineering. It refers to the analysis and redesign of workflows both within and between the organisation and the external entities.

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Its objective is to improve performance in terms of time, cost, quality, and responsiveness to customers. It implies giving up old practices and adopting the improved ones. It is an effective tool of realising new strategies.

Improving business processes is paramount for businesses to stay competitive in today's marketplace. New technologies are rapidly bringing new capabilities to businesses, thereby raising the strategical options and the need to improve business processes dramatically. Even the competition has become harder. In today's market place, major changes are required to just stay even.

- (2) **ERP:** ERP stand for enterprise resource planning which is an IT based system linking isolated information centers across the organisation into an integrated enterprise wide structured functional and activity bases. ERP is successor to MRP systems (material requirements and manufacturing resource planning systems). ERP is used for strengthening the procurement and management of input factors.

Modern ERP systems deliver end-to-end capabilities to support the entire performance management of an organisation. It helps in consolidated financial reporting, financial management, planning, budgeting, performance management and so on.

- (3) **Benchmarking:** It is a process of finding the best practices within and outside the industry to which an organisation belongs. Knowledge of the best helps in standards setting and finding ways to match or even surpass own performances with the best performances.

Benchmarking is a process of continuous improvement in search for competitive advantage. Firms can use benchmarking process to achieve improvement in diverse range of management function like maintenance operations, assessment of total manufacturing costs, product development, product distribution, customer services, plant utilisation levels and human resource management

- (4) **Value Chain:** Value chain facilitates procurement of whole range of inputs that are required to produce a product or service so that the process can be performed in an integrated and optimum manner. Vendors, transporters, and buyers are the components of the value chain and share the benefits of such chains.

Value chain recognises organisations as more than a random collection of machines, money and people. These resources are of no value unless deployed into activities and organised into routines and systems which ensure that products or services are produced which are of value to the final consumer/user.

Question 5

Define Business Process Re-engineering. Briefly outline the steps therein.

(4 + 6 = 10 Marks) (June, 2009)

Answer

Business Process Reengineering (BPR) is an approach to unusual improvement in operating effectiveness through the redesigning of critical business processes and supporting business

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systems. It is revolutionary redesign of key business processes that involves examination of the basic process itself. It looks at the minute details of the process, such as why the work is done, who does it, where is it done and when it is done. BPR refers to the analysis and redesign of workflows and processes both within the organization and between the organization and the external entities like suppliers, distributors, and service providers.

The orientation of redesigning efforts is basically radical. In other words, it is a total deconstruction and rethinking of business process in its entirety, unconstrained by its existing structure and pattern. Its objective is to obtain quantum jump in process performance in terms of time, cost, output, quality, and responsiveness to customers. BPR is a revolutionary redesigning of key business processes.

BPR involves the following steps:

1. **Determining objectives and framework:** Objectives are the desired end results of the redesign process which the management and organization attempts to achieve. This will provide the required focus, direction, and motivation for the redesign process. It helps in building a comprehensive foundation for the reengineering process.
2. **Identify customers and determine their needs:** The designers have to understand customers - their profile, their steps in acquiring, using and disposing a product. The purpose is to redesign business process that clearly provides added value to the customer.
3. **Study the existing process:** The existing processes will provide an important base for the redesigners. The purpose is to gain an understanding of the 'what', and 'why' of the targeted process. However, some companies go through the reengineering process with clean perspective without laying emphasis on the past processes.
4. **Formulate a redesign process plan:** The information gained through the earlier steps is translated into an ideal redesign process. Formulation of redesign plan is the real crux of the reengineering efforts. Customer focussed redesign concepts are identified and formulated. In this step alternative processes are considered and the best is selected.
5. **Implement the redesign:** It is easier to formulate new process than to implement them. Implementation of the redesigned process and application of other knowledge gained from the previous steps is key to achieve dramatic improvements. It is the joint responsibility of the designers and management to operationalise the new process.

Question 6

What is Six Sigma? How is it different from other quality programs? Explain in brief themes of Six Sigma.

(2 + 2 + 6 = 10 Marks) (Nov., 2009)

Answer

Meaning of Six Sigma : Primarily Six sigma means maintenance of the desired quality in processes and end products. It means taking systemic and integrated efforts toward improving quality and reducing cost.

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It is a highly disciplined process that helps in developing and delivering near-perfect products and services. It strives to meet and improve organizational goals on quality, cost, scheduling, manpower, new products and so on. It works continuously towards revising the current standards and establishing higher ones. Six sigma has its base in the concept of probability and normal distribution in statistics. Six sigma strives that 99.99966% of products manufactured are defect free.

Six sigma efforts target three main areas:

- ◆ Improving customer satisfaction
- ◆ Reducing cycle time
- ◆ Reducing defects

Six sigma and other quality programs

Six sigma is improvement over other quality programmes:

- (i) Six sigma is customer focused. It strives to provide better satisfaction to the customer owning the product.
- (ii) Six sigma is a total management commitment and philosophy of excellence, process improvement and the rule of measurement.
- (iii) Six sigma induces changes in management operations - new approaches to thinking, planning and executing to achieve results.
- (iv) Six sigma combines both leadership and grassroots energy and involvement for its success.

Six themes of six sigma

The critical elements of six sigma can be put into six themes as follows:

- ◆ **Theme one** – *genuine focus on the customer*: Companies launching six sigma often to find that how little they really understand about their customers. In six sigma, customer focus becomes the top priority. For example, the measures of six sigma performance begin with the customer. Six sigma improvements are defined by their impact on customer satisfaction and value.
- ◆ **Theme two** – *data and fact-driven management*: Six sigma takes the concept 'of "management by fact" to a new, more powerful level. Despite the attention paid in recent years to improved information systems, knowledge management, and so on, many business decisions are still being based on opinions, assumptions and gut feeling. Six sigma discipline begins by clarifying what measures are key to gauging business performance and then gathers data and analyzes key variables. Problems are effectively defined, analyzed, and resolved. Six sigma also helps managers to answer two essential questions to support data-driven decisions and solutions.
 - ◆ What data/information is really required?

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- ◆ How to use the data/information for maximum benefit?
- ◆ **Theme three** – *processes are where the action is* Designing products and services, measuring performance, improving efficiency and customer satisfaction and so on. Six sigma positions the process as the key vehicle of success. One of the most remarkable breakthroughs in Six Sigma efforts to date has been convincing leaders and managers. Process may relate to build competitive advantage in delivering value to customers.
- ◆ **Theme four** – *proactive management*: In simple terms, being proactive means acting in advance of events rather than reacting to them. In the real world, though, proactive management means making habits out of what are, too often, neglected business practices: defining ambitious goals and reviewing them frequently, setting clear priorities, focusing on problem prevention rather than fire-fighting, and questioning why we do things instead of blindly defending them.

Far from being boring or overly analytical, being truly proactive is a starting point for creativity and effective change. Six sigma, encompasses tools and practices that replace reactive habits with a dynamic, responsive, proactive style of management.
- ◆ **Theme five** – *boundaryless collaboration*: "Boundarylessness" is one of Jack Welch's mantras for business success. Years before launching six sigma, GE's chairman was working to break barriers and to improve teamwork up, down, and across organizational lines. The opportunities available through improved collaboration within companies and with vendors and customers are huge. Billions of dollars are lost every day because of disconnects and outright competition between groups that should be working for a common cause: providing value to customers.
- ◆ **Theme six** – *drive for perfection; tolerate failure*: Organizations need to make efforts to achieve perfection and yet at the same time tolerate failure. In essence, though, the two ideas are complementary. No company will get even close to six sigma without launching new ideas and approaches-which always involve some risk. Six sigma cannot be implemented by individuals who are overly cautious and are scared of making mistakes.