

Is the Six Sigma Fad Dead?

By Tim Noble

Like the Slinky and Silly Putty, business fads have their own limited lifespan, so it is natural to ask: Is Six Sigma dead, or at least waning in popularity? While there is no standard definition of what constitutes a business fad, a fad is often characterized as being an initiative that is adopted widely by companies and often falls from grace when the hoped for benefits fail to materialize.

The average life cycle of a business theory of management or fad is typically five years and Six Sigma has been part of our business lexicon for almost a decade. So is it time for the business chapter on Six Sigma to come to a close? The interest in Six Sigma is still very strong despite its almost decade long run. This may be due to the fact that over the past decade Six Sigma has shown great flexibility in its application beyond its roots in manufacturing.

If published books are any indicator, the interest in Six Sigma is continuing to grow. In the past two years alone over 100 books have been published on the subject of Six Sigma, a seven-fold increase over the number of books published on the subject five years ago. This can only help to elevate the interest in Six Sigma as more business leaders become immersed in the published materials now being made available.

Like any other business practice, Six Sigma is an initiative that if implemented incorrectly can become just another fad in the eyes of business leaders. There is no questioning the fact that the success of an initiative like Six Sigma comes down to leadership and the quality of its execution. Too often an initiative like Six Sigma can gain a fad-like stigma in some companies because it fails to deliver as promised, when all the while it was an issue of leadership that drove the failure.

So to answer the question, "Is the Six Sigma fad dead?" The answer is clearly no. However, what will eventually determine whether Six Sigma is viewed by businesses as a just a passing management fad or not, largely depends of the leadership and success of its execution.

About the Author:

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