Six Sigma Professionals Valuable in Facilities Management

By Sami L. Barry & James G. Lord

Facilities Management is a critical component in the overall success of healthcare and higher education institutions, and other organizations that have significant real estate assets. As an increasing number of these entities strive for Operational Excellence, facilities teams will need to function in tandem with administration and executive management on strategic initiatives and long-term objectives. Their ultimate goal will be to save costs and maximize return on investments related to the overall management of facilities, technology integration, sustainability, energy management, and capital project delivery.

Operational Excellence is a philosophy of leadership, teamwork, and problem solving whose purpose is the continuous improvement of an organization in all areas of performance, including decision making, ongoing investment, profitability, customer and partner services, and human resources capabilities. Its key priorities are customer satisfaction, employee empowerment, and operations optimization. A primary tool in the quest for Operational Excellence is Six Sigma (6σ), which is prompting strong interest within the facilities sector for professionals who are certified in this business improvement concept.

What is Six Sigma?

6σ is a methodology that uses statistical analyses to identify and eliminate defects in business processes, and to measure and improve a company's performance. Similar to Operational Excellence, 6σ focuses on enhancing customer satisfaction, business systems, productivity, and financial performance.

Key results of 6σ are:

✓ Enhanced customer satisfaction through improved value.
✓ Enhanced reputation in the marketplace.
✓ Better use of resources which translates to better workforce utilization and productivity.
✓ Improved safety and reliability.
✓ Increased efficiency and cost savings.
✓ Stronger business partnerships that encourage long-term relationships.
6σ's value expands within facilities management to enhance the operational performance on capital projects by:

✓ Providing a better understanding of projects and market rates; and more accurate timelines.
✓ Improving safety of the work environment.
✓ Identifying major wastes.
✓ Mitigating potential delays.
✓ Identifying defects and reworks.
✓ Controlling and improving the quality of work.
✓ Improving overall investment and benefits.
✓ Validating the results and savings after the completion of projects.

The attractiveness of Six Sigma candidates in facilities

6σ-certified professionals are highly attractive to facilities departments within institutions and other organizations that have large real estate portfolios. More specifically, 6σ Black Belt- and Master Black Belt-certified individuals, and their well-developed skill sets are increasingly in demand. These particular individuals are high-performing professionals who are either already in leadership positions or who have the capabilities to grow into leadership roles. They possess advanced 6σ knowledge and experiences, and are recognized as change agents with the abilities to identify inefficiencies, develop and implement innovative solutions, and lead those changes. 6σ Black Belts and Master Black Belts also add value through their:

Communication & Motivation Skills

While their strong process knowledge and analytical skills are their most important qualities, 6σ Black Belts’ and Master Black Belts’ communication and motivation skills are critical as well. This is because, many times, they are expected to simplify complex ideas and communicate them in positive and motivational ways with all levels of employees.

Business Acumen & Technical Aptitude

6σ Black Belts and Master Black Belts possess deep knowledge of an organization’s services and its market environment, and are able to identify current and potential challenges to drive a program accordingly. While it is not necessary for these professionals to have backgrounds in engineering or statistics, they have an inclination towards data analysis, and using statistical calculations and techniques.

Jim Lord, Managing Director, has extensive recruitment experience within the facilities management sector, representing healthcare and higher education institutions, preparatory schools, non-profits, corporations, and other organizations that have considerable real estate assets. He says, “Due to the fact that many organizations are pursuing Operational Excellence and because facilities management is most always at the top of an organization’s balance sheet, Six Sigma has garnered much attention in recent years. Facilities teams work on both sides of an organization’s spectrum. They have to serve internal customers, while at the same time, save costs to enhance the bottom line. By applying Six Sigma, a department can enhance its performance as well as its credibility on both sides.”

Lord has been an executive search consultant with Helbling since 1998 and says, “I have seen Six Sigma certification become a highly-regarded skill set for various roles as organizations seek to improve the efficiencies within their departments. Facilities teams are under extreme pressure to enhance asset management, reduce costs, and increase efficiencies, and they are continually expected to do more with less. Instead of focusing on cost cutting measures, Six Sigma focuses on...
processes and how to improve them. Simply, it allows data to manage decisions, not perspectives."

One area of facilities management in which $6\sigma$ can be beneficial is preventive maintenance. Lord says, "It is not abnormal for large universities and hospitals to have 30,000 work orders annually. With that much activity, there is a lot of potential for inefficiencies. If an institution has someone who can manage out those inefficiencies, there are tremendous savings to be reaped because of the high cost of facilities maintenance."

For a current Maintenance Program Manager search with a higher education institution, $6\sigma$ is a preferred skill set of ideal candidates. The institution’s representative with whom Lord is working closely is the Executive Director of Facilities Operations. The individual is a $6\sigma$ Black Belt and he knows firsthand how to improve the performance of teams, streamline processes, reduce expenses, and increase revenue, all of which equate to more satisfied customers. Not surprisingly, the Executive Director strongly believes in the value of securing an individual for the Maintenance Program Manager role with the same certification and associated skills. Lord says, "The role is responsible for mapping out processes, looking for inefficiencies and removing those inefficiencies. The individual is expected to improve workforce productivity and work quality by reducing cycle time and optimizing response time to work orders. They will play an integral part in assessing resources, developing work plans, tracking progress, analyzing variances, and identifying capital improvement projects. Therefore, a candidate with Six Sigma could add immense value to the role."

Preventive maintenance is not the only aspect of facilities management that can benefit from Six Sigma. Lord explains, "Six Sigma can also be applied to energy management, technology integration, green building and sustainability, and capital projects. I believe that, as more organizations pursue Operational Excellence in all of their operations, and facilities departments have additional pressures put upon them to increase efficiency and save costs, the demand for candidates who have Six Sigma certification will grow."

The competitive business environment is prompting organizations of all sectors to strive for streamlined processes and enhanced efficiencies. $6\sigma$ is a vital tool in achieving these goals and it is only beginning to be applied within facilities management. As $6\sigma$ continues to grow in popularity and application, the demand for certified facilities professionals will increase for it is these progressive individuals who will act as facilitators in moving their departments forward in advanced facilities-related strategies.

Sources: FM and Beyond, Health Facilities Management, Six Sigma Online
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