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EDITORIAL

By Bill Swichtenberg



Measuring Quality

Performance measurements are critical to any business organization. No management system can hope to succeed without the proper metrics in place. However, for many people these measurements still are poorly understood.

Performance tools are designed to help companies/utilities improve quality and increase customer satisfaction. (For a look at how one company used performance tools to rebound and revitalize its business, turn to page 14.)

There are three major quality initiatives aimed at achieving goals. The Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, ISO 9001:2000 and Six Sigma offer a different emphasis to help organizations improve performance and increase customer satisfaction.

Conferred by the U.S. Department of Commerce through the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the Baldrige Award focuses on excellence in performance and productivity. The criteria measures seven components required for quality, productivity and success: leadership, strategic planning, customer and market focus, information and analysis, human resources, process management and business results.

ISO 9001:2000 concentrates on fixing quality system defects and product/service nonconformities. The standard specifies requirements for a quality management system for any organization that needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable regulatory requirements and aims to enhance customer satisfaction.

The standard is based on eight quality management principles: customer focus, leadership, involvement of people, process approach, system approach to management, continual improvement, factual approach to decision making and mutually beneficial supplier relationships.

Six Sigma is a structured, data-driven methodology for eliminating defects, waste or quality control problems. Its methodology is based on the combination of established statistical quality control techniques, data analysis methods and the systematic training of all personnel at every level in the organization in the activity or process targeted by Six Sigma.

Some spectacular Six Sigma success stories have been well documented. The technique basically identifies an area where there is a problem, measures it, works out why there is a problem and then fixes it.

In 2000, Operations Management International, Inc. (OMI) became the first company in the water/wastewater sector to earn the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. OMI has been dedicated to a culture of excellence. Their slogan is "obsessed with quality."

While these approaches to quality are different, they can be compatible. An organization's needs should drive the choice. More information on these techniques can be found at www.quality.nist.gov/issue_sheet_options.htm.

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