

Six Sigma & Communications

Perceptions of the Industry

**Are Public Relations Professionals Meeting the Operational Challenge:
A Survey on the Impact of Communications on Six Sigma**

**Executive Summary
February 2006**

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About This Study

To gain insight on the impact that communication practices have on the Six Sigma process, this study seeks to explain the Six Sigma process, explore the relationship between communications and the quality movement and describes to what extent communication practices are an integral part of Six Sigma. The results reported in this executive summary were gathered using a nationwide quantitative survey of communications professionals.

A special thanks goes to Mark Weiner, president of [Delahaye](#), for offering this research project access to his firm's resources and to Annette Arno, Director of Survey Research, for her expertise and help. Without Delahaye's support, this research would not have been possible. Thanks also go out to Tun Aung, president of [Business Communication Design](#), for lending graphic design and Web hosting services support to this research.

Jerry Mikorenda
February 2006

About the Researcher

Jerry Mikorenda (ABC) -- has more than 15 years experience in corporate communications as a project manager, department head and strategic business planner. During that time, he has been honored with more than 20 communication awards including five IABC Gold Quills in such diverse areas as feature writing, branding, electronic communication and strategic management.

He has worked for Fortune 100 companies such as Xerox, International Paper and JP Morgan Chase. As a journalist his work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, *The Boston Herald*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and various other magazines. He is accredited by IABC and is a certified Six Sigma Green Belt project leader.

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Methodology

This survey was conducted in the form of an electronic, self-administrated questionnaire using a Likert scale to gauge the attitudes and reactions of respondents. Space was also provided for participants to write verbatim comments about the survey or subject matter. The survey was distributed by Delahaye, a division of Bacon's Information Inc. that specializes in research and analysis, to 1,000 potential respondents identified as executives in charge of Six Sigma or communication programs at a cross-section of organizations in North America. Areas analyzed in the research include:

- Use of Six Sigma within the respondent's organization and the frequency with which they work with a Six Sigma team.
- Impressions as to the extent that communications influences the success of a Six Sigma project within their company.
- Perceptions of the communications tactics best suited for engaging employees in the Six Sigma process and successfully completing a Six Sigma process.
- Perceptions of communications within the respondents' organization and how they influence those groups.
- Demographic information, including gender, age, highest level of education attained, employer's industry segment, number of employees at a respondent's organization, location of the organization, the respondent's position within the organization and years of service.

The survey was conducted over a twenty-day period between November 4 and 23, 2005.

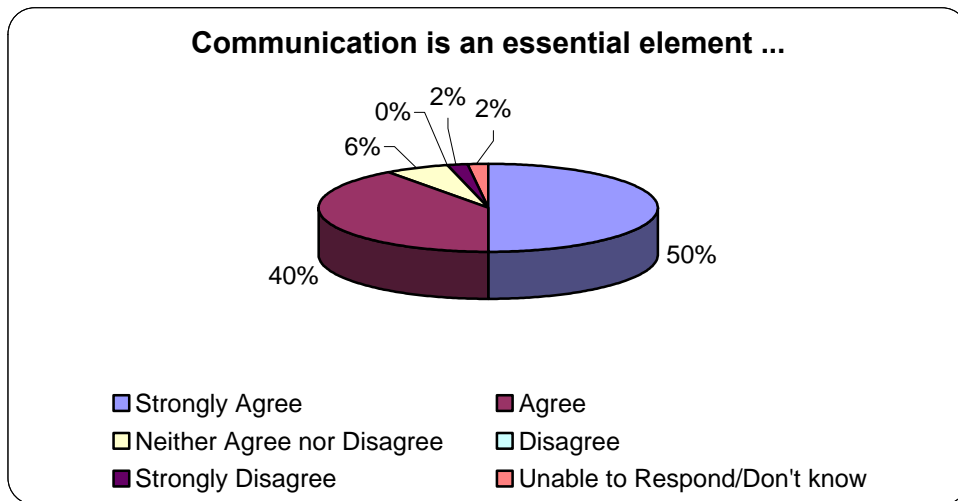
Return rate: One hundred ten (110) participants completed all questions of the online survey out of a sample pool of one thousand (1,000) contacts for an eleven percent (11%) return rate.

While anecdotally this is considered a "good" return rate for a random email survey where returns of three to five percent are "average," it left the study with a margin of error of +/- 8.82 to achieve statistically valid results with ninety-five percent (95%) confidence level for this sample size.

Part I: Six Sigma and Communications

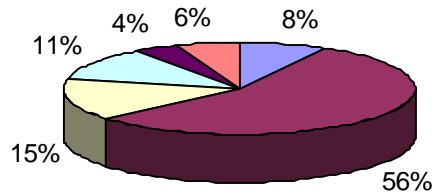
Findings: Respondents were split evenly (48%) between those whose organizations use Six Sigma as a productivity tool and those that do not, with (4%) responding that they did not know if it was used.

Respondents believe communication is an essential element of a successful Six Sigma project. Among the key results from Part I of the survey – Six Sigma and Communications -- was a very strong belief in the important role communication plays in Six Sigma. When asked if, “Communication is an essential element of a successful Six Sigma project,” (90%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, with (50%) strongly agreeing. Respondents were also definitive when asked, “Clear, consistent communication is one of the primary keys to making sure your Six Sigma initiatives are working,” (86%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, with (21%) strongly agreeing. Likewise, (47%) of those surveyed strongly agreed with the statement, “Interactivity, two-way communication (dialogue, listening and feedback), is critical to the success of the Six Sigma process,” with (45%) agreeing.



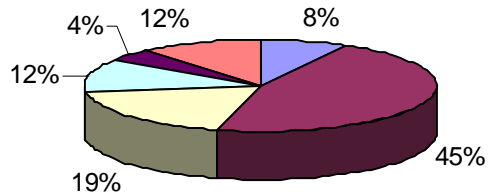
Responses to these questions demonstrated that the participants realized the manner in which they communicate has a direct effect upon the success of their Six Sigma projects. When asked, “What factors contribute the most to the success of a Six Sigma team?” (67%) said that the “Project leader's ability to engage the team” was the number one factor,” followed by “The team's ability to work together,” and (63%) said the “team’s ability to communicate” was important as well.

Measure plans during phases ...



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Unable to Respond/Don't know

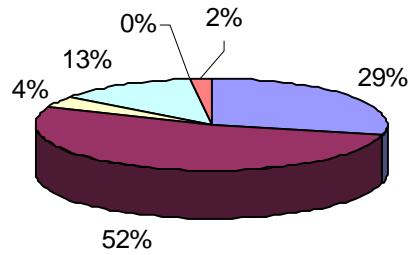
Poor communication a root cause ...



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Unable to Respond/Don't know

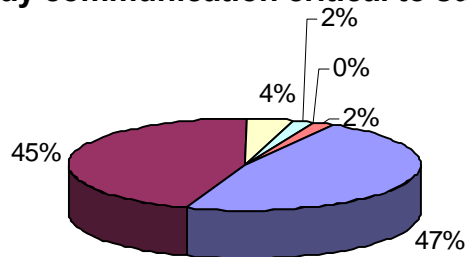
When asked if, "Poor communication practices are a root cause for Six Sigma projects failing," (54%) strongly agreed or agreed with the premise, (19%) neither agreed or disagreed, (15.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and (11.5%) were unable to answer. Similarly, (55.5%) strongly agreed or agreed that, "There is a financial value or penalty for communicating well/not well during a Six Sigma project," (11.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and (9.5%) were unable to answer.

Communication pros are viable leaders ...



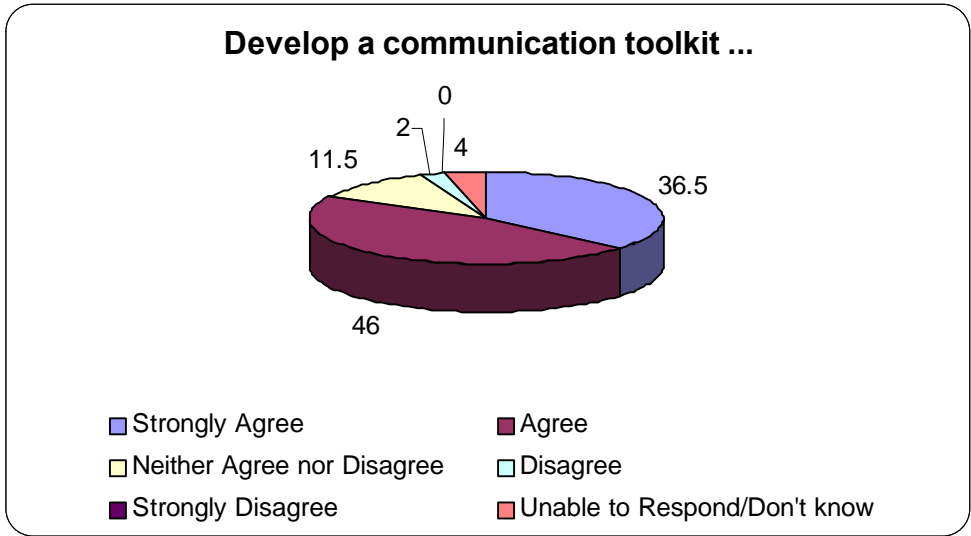
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Unable to Respond/Don't know

Two-way communication critical to success ...

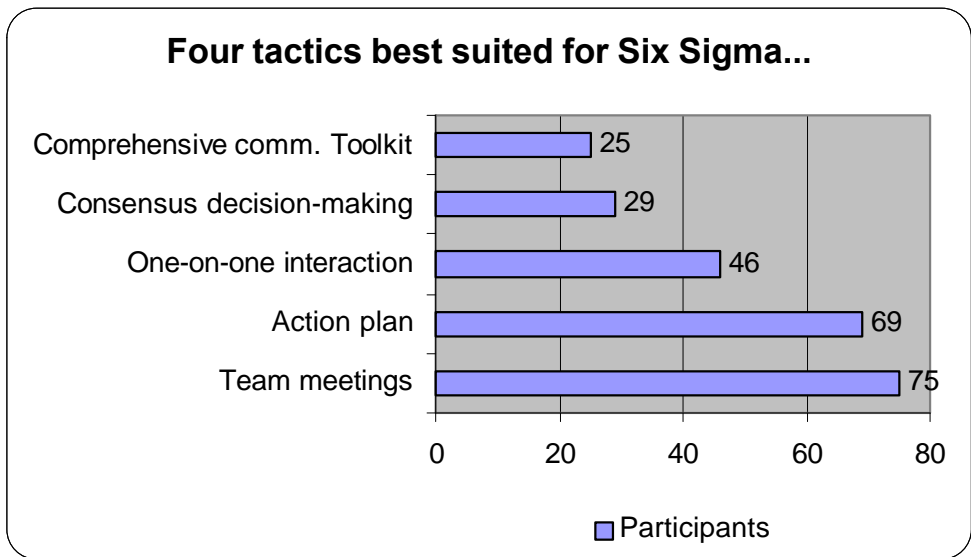


- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Unable to Respond/Don't know

While all this bodes well for identifying how important communication is to Six Sigma, respondents were equally optimistic about their own role in the process. Eighty-one percent (81%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “Communication professionals are viable leaders in bringing an understanding of Six Sigma to various internal/external audiences,” and (13%) disagreed. However, when asked if “Master Black Belts [Black Belts] and others on an operational Six Sigma team value communication,” respondents were less sure with (57.5%) strongly agreeing or agreeing, (17.2%) neither agreed or disagreed and another (17.2%) disagreeing.



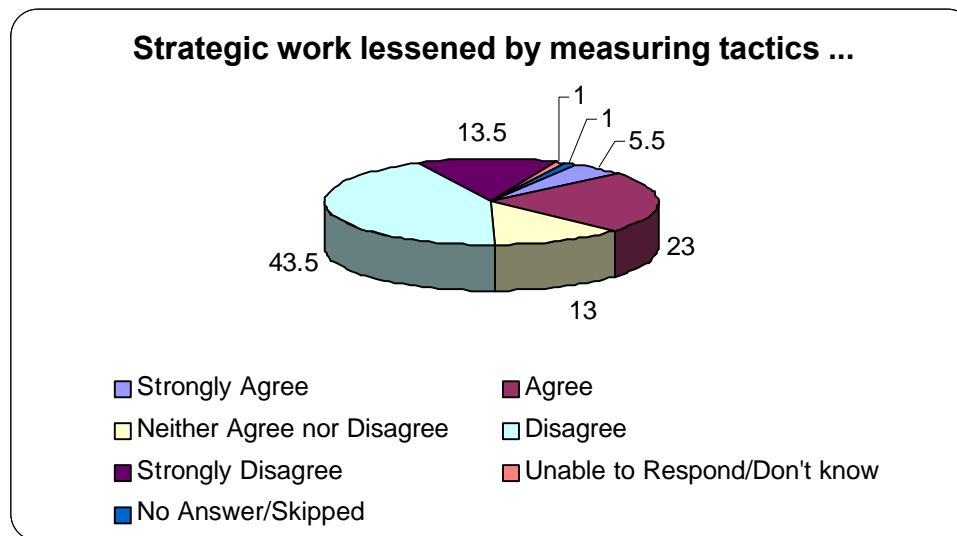
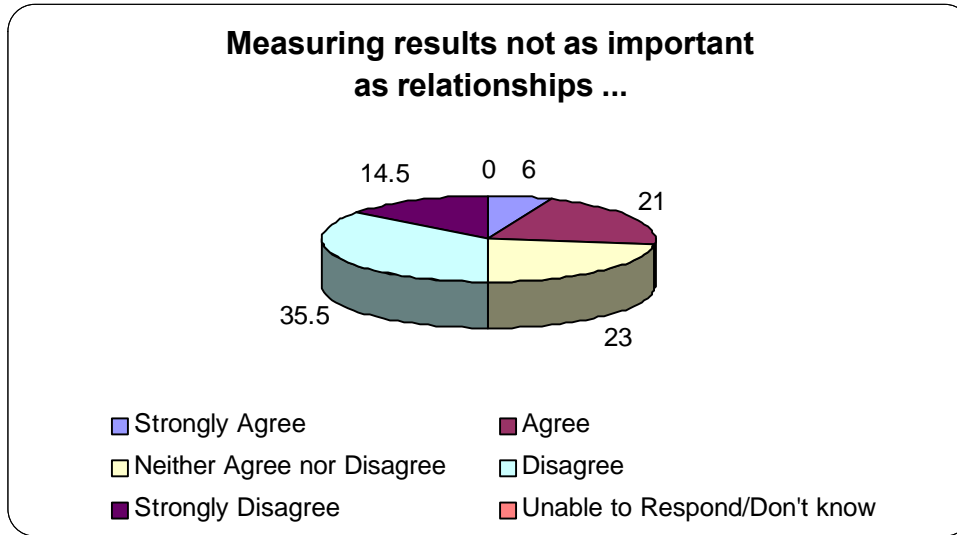
When asked, “Which of the four (4) communication tactics listed below are best suited for engaging employees in the Six Sigma process?” (56%) of participants said department meetings, (52%) a Communication’s toolkit, followed by town halls and lunchbox learning sessions at (39%) each.



Part II: Perceptions About Communications

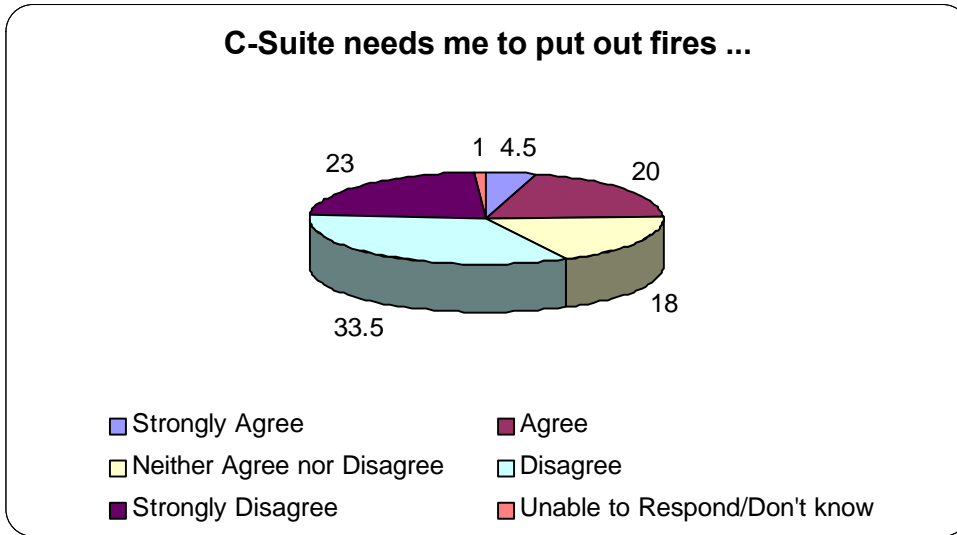
Findings: In part two of the questionnaire, respondents were asked their perceptions about communications. Here all 110 participants contributed responses to the questions.

Are maintaining relationships more important than measuring results? Asked if, “Measuring the results of a communications project is not as important as developing relationships with key constituents,” (50%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement while (27%) strongly agreed or agreed, and (23%) neither agreed or disagreed. Similarly, (57%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “The strategic work I do is lessened if I rely on measuring tactics too frequently,” however, (28.5%) strongly agreed or agreed and (13%) neither agreed or disagreed.

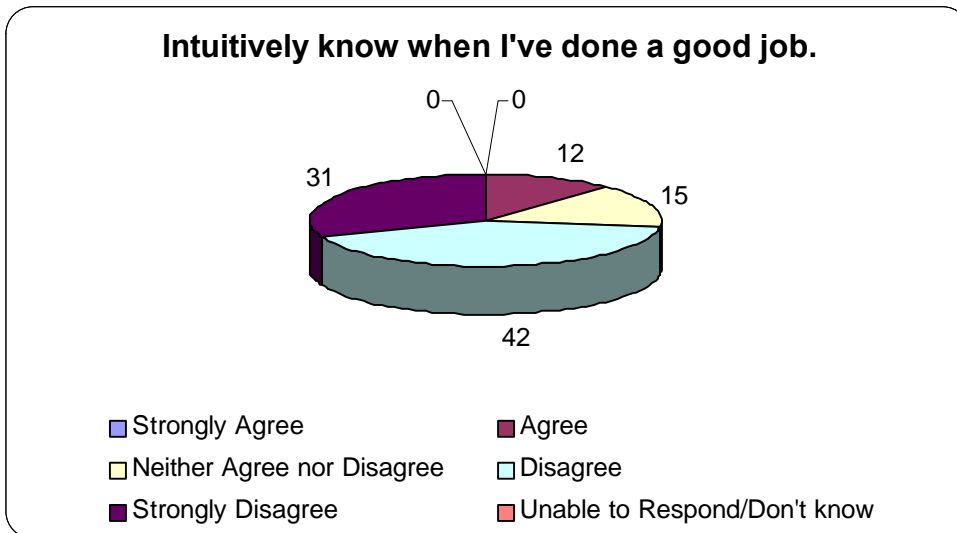


Sixty-eight percent (68%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (31% strongly disagreeing) with the statement. “In general, communication resources are not focused on increasing the market value of an organization,” although (20%) strongly agreed or agreed and (11%) neither agreed or disagreed. Respondents were also polarized on the question, “I feel more comfortable presenting an idea or concept than discussing numbers and statistics,” with (46%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing and (37%) strongly agreeing or agreeing, (17%) neither agreed or disagreed.

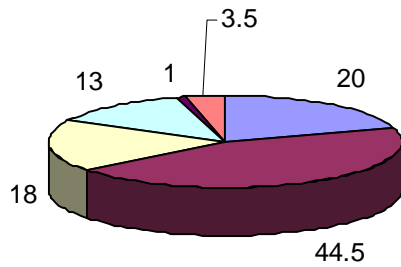
Consensus was much clearer on the set of questions regarding measuring communication outcomes. When asked, “The C-Suite (CEO, COO, CFO, etc.) of my organization isn't interested in measuring communication results, they need my function to put out fires before a real problem occurs,” (56.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, but (24.5%) strongly agreed or agreed, with (18%) neither agreeing or disagreeing.



Interestingly, results were more mixed for questions that probed the specific behavior of respondents. For instance, “All my major communication initiatives are developed with a plan that measures before and after results,” (41%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (only 2% strongly) while (38%) strongly agreed or agreed and (20%) neither agreed or disagreed. When asked, “My organization audits its communication function on a regular basis (at least once every three years),” (48%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, (31%) strongly agreed or agreed, (12%) neither agreed or disagreed and (9%) were unable to answer.



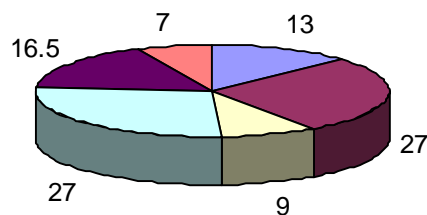
Measurement doesn't evaluate communication.



The final set of questions in this section gauged the perceived value of communications in the organization as a whole. Here respondents were confident of their place in the corporate world. Sixty-four percent (64%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “The value of communications as a stand-alone function in my organization has decreased over the past three years,” (21%) strongly agreed or agreed, (11%) neither agreed or disagreed and (3.5%) were unable to answer.

Results were more mixed when asked, “Over the last three years staffing for the communications function in my organization has been reduced,” (41%) strongly agreed or agreed and (47%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with (8%) neither agreeing or disagreeing. Likewise, when asked, “Over the last three years the annual budget for the communications function in my organization has been reduced,” (40%) strongly agreed or agreed and (43.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, (9%) neither agreeing or disagreeing and (7%) were unable to answer the question.

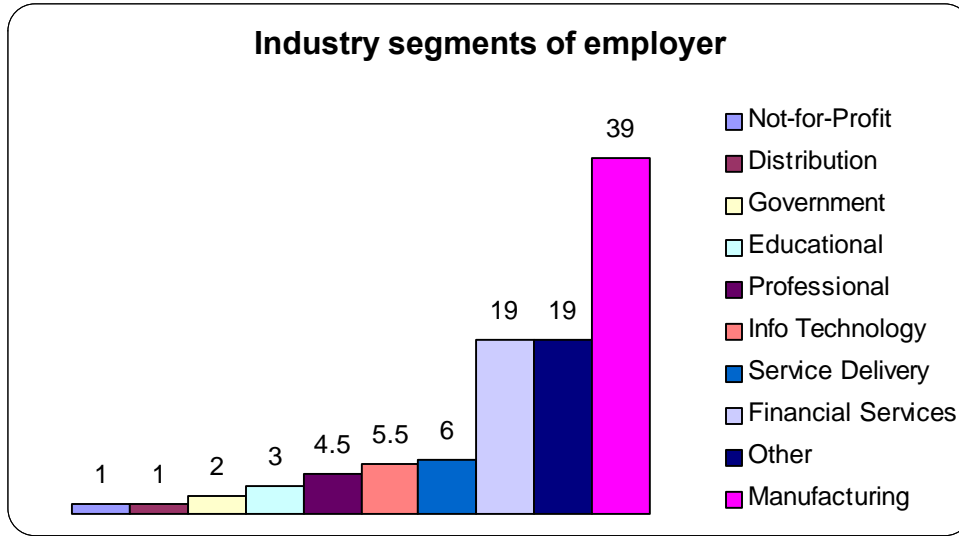
Budget reduced over three years ...



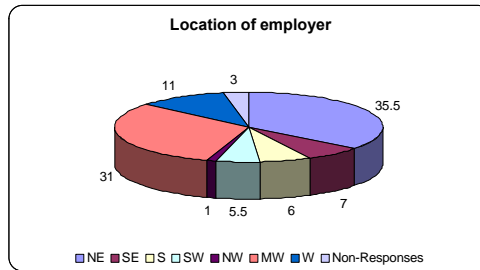
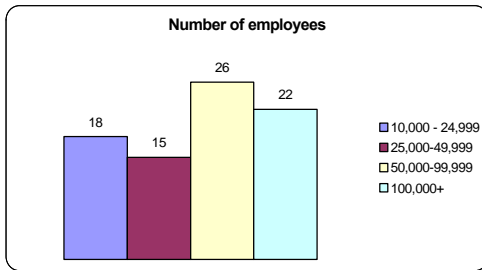
Part III: Demographics

A quick review of the respondent's demographic profile reveals several interesting aspects about the survey's participants. Fifty-four percent (54%) of respondents were female, (46%) male.

Nearly half (43%) were in the 45 to 54 year-old age group followed by (26%) in the 35 to 44 bracket and (18%) in the 25 to 34 group. Forty-seven percent (47%) hold Master's degrees (MA, MS, MBA) while (48%) have four year degrees (BA, BS, AB) and (3%) a Doctorate level education (PhD, EDD).



Other: Aerospace/Defense, Biotechnology/Pharmaceutical, Energy/Utilities, Health Care, Transportation



Conclusions

In general, it seems clear that those participants who work closely with Six Sigma tend to have more favorable views on communications and the positive impact it can have on operations and business initiatives. They also see communications as a tactical extension of operations and an integrated business function.

The respondents to part one of the survey were more decisive to their answers tending to “strongly agree” more with statements that resonated with them than their counterparts in section two. In reviewing the data from section two of the survey, the item that stands out the most is the large number of “neither agreeing or disagreeing” responses – an average of about 17 percent per question. Given the straight-forward nature of the questions that appears to be a very high number.

Responses in section two also lacked “passion” at the extremes (strongly agreeing or strongly disagreeing). Except for a few circumstances, most response data was from the “agree” or “disagree” categories showing that perhaps these questions didn’t resonate well with participants, or they are not comfortable with the material being discussed.

This survey was not without its drawbacks. The relatively low response rate makes it hard to draw any industry-wide conclusions from the data. Replicating these results as part of a larger global sample would help shed immeasurable light on this issue and provide a strong framework for bridging the gap between business operations and communications.

February 2006

Verbatim Comments

The following are selections from the 20 comments received in the write-in section of the survey and are representative of the categories and issues raised.

“Question 7 [Part II] was an either/or question. The reality here is that the C-suite has been begging for metrics around PR, but Corporate Communications has dug in their heels against any sort of metrics. The really sad thing is that no one in the C-suite cares enough about the role of Corp Comm. to call them on it. As a result, our Corp Comm. function is insular, dysfunctional, and immaterial to the company's strategic goals.”

“I am a firm believer in linking PR's marketing impacts to business results, and have accomplished that through both a market mix analysis and deal-level metrics with my clients. Good luck in your research. Push the PR industry toward a business-based approach, and you will elevate this profession.”

“Leading questions lead to invalid results. This is but one of many surveys I've seen trying to justify communications. Its results will be next to useless.”

“In a previous job I worked with six sigma. Having credible information to communicate and developing/reviewing a communication plan on a weekly (or every two week basis) is critical for success.”

“Communication and leadership commitment are two of the biggest contributing factors to the level of success any Six Sigma or other major change initiative will achieve”.

Survey Instrument: The following is a copy of the online questionnaire used in this study.

Introduction

Thanks in advance for agreeing to participate in this research project. The data collected through this survey will help shed light on how communication practices can be better leveraged to optimize the Six Sigma process. By completing the following questionnaire, you will be providing valuable insight into communications changing role in Corporate America.

Your answers to this survey are completely voluntary and will be kept in the strictest confidence by Syracuse University, Delahaye and myself. No mention of you or your organization will appear in the final report or case study analysis.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this questionnaire, please free to contact me at 631-678-7558 and jmikore@yahoo.com. Please complete the survey by November 23, 2005 to have your results tabulated as part of this study.

For your convenience, the survey's 42 questions have been divided into three (3) sections.

- **Part I: Six Sigma & Communications**
- **Part II: Perceptions about Communication**
- **Part III: Demographics**

The total time to complete all three sections is estimated to take 10-12 minutes.

Contact Info

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To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “It is important to develop a communication plan for every six sigma project.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Master Black Belts [Black Belts] and others on an operational six sigma team value communication.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Communication professionals are viable leaders in bringing an understanding of Six Sigma to various internal/external audiences.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Poor communication practices are a root cause for a six sigma projects failing.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “There is a financial value or penalty for communicating well/not well during a six sigma project.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “The effectiveness of a communications plan needs to be measured during the various phases of a six sigma project”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Interactivity, two-way communication (dialogue, listening and feedback), is critical to the success of the Six Sigma process?”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Clear, consistent communication is one of the primary keys to making sure your six sigma initiatives are working.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Communication is all about doing what is necessary to convince senior leaders that your six sigma project goals are meaningful.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Six Sigma methodology would benefit from developing a best practices communication toolkit available to trainers, project leaders and communicators.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

Which of the four (4) below communication tactics do you believe are best suited for engaging employees in the six sigma process.

1. Department meetings —
2. Town halls —
3. CEO memos —
4. Videotapes —
5. Customized pamphlets —
6. Lunchbox sessions —
7. Comprehensive Comm. Toolkit —
8. Email updates —
9. Special Web sites (blogs, etc) —
10. Special newsletters —
11. Recognition events —
12. Feedback Surveys —
13. Contests/Quizzes —
14. Posters —
15. None of the above —

Which of the four (4) below communication tactics do you believe are best suited for successfully completing a six sigma project.

1. Team meetings —
2. Team building exercises —
3. Action Plans —
4. Creative thinking exercises —
5. Special Web sites (blogs, etc) —
6. One-on-one interaction —
7. Email Updates —
8. Consensus Decision-making —
9. Team Lunches —
10. Comprehensive Comm. Toolkit —
11. Conference Calls —
12. Team Recognition events —
13. Individual Recognition —

- 14. Monetary Incentives _____
- 15. 360 Feedback _____
- 16. None of the above _____

Part II: Perceptions about Communication

Check the response that best fits your answer (13 questions, approximately 5 mins. to complete). The term “communications” refers to any activity undertaken by an organization to influence its employees, customers or other audiences it wishes to engage.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Measuring the results of a communication project is not as important as developing relationships with key constituents.”

- 1. Strongly Agree _____
- 2. Agree _____
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree _____
- 4. Disagree _____
- 5. Strongly Disagree _____
- 6. Unable to Respond _____

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “The strategic work I do is lessened if I rely on measuring tactics too frequently.”

- 1. Strongly Agree _____
- 2. Agree _____
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree _____
- 4. Disagree _____
- 5. Strongly Disagree _____
- 6. Unable to Respond _____

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “I feel more comfortable presenting an idea or concept than discussing numbers and statistics.”

- 1. Strongly Agree _____
- 2. Agree _____
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree _____
- 4. Disagree _____
- 5. Strongly Disagree _____
- 6. Unable to Respond _____

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “The C-Suite (CEO, COO, CFO, etc) of my organization isn’t interested in measuring communication results, they need my function to put out fires before a real problem occurs.”

- 1. Strongly Agree _____
- 2. Agree _____
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree _____
- 4. Disagree _____
- 5. Strongly Disagree _____
- 6. Unable to Respond _____

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “In general, communication resources are not focused on increasing the market value of an organization.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Communication is most effective when it is embedded in the business process or part of operations.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “All my major communication initiatives are developed with a plan that measures before and after results.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “I don’t need to measure a project’s success, I intuitively know when my function has done a good job.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “The problem with current measurement techniques is they don’t effectively evaluate the impact communications contributes to a program’s success.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “My organization audits its communication function on a regular basis (at least once every three years).”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “The value of communications as a stand-alone function in my organization has decreased over the past three years.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Over the last three years staffing for the communications function in my organization has been reduced.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Over the last three years the annual budget for the communications function in my organization has been reduced.”

- 1. Strongly Agree ___
- 2. Agree ___
- 3. Neither Agree or Disagree ___
- 4. Disagree ___
- 5. Strongly Disagree ___
- 6. Unable to Respond ___

Part III: Demographics

Check the response that best fits your answer (12 questions, approximately 3 mins. to complete).

I am (check the appropriate answer):

- 1. Male ___
- 2. Female ___

If US based, what region of the country do you work?

- 1. Northeast ___
- 2. South ___
- 3. Southwest ___
- 4. Northwest ___
- 5. Midwest ___

What level is your position in the company?

- 1. SVP ___
- 2. VP ___
- 3. AVP ___
- 4. Director ___
- 5. Supervisor ___
- 6. Manager ___
- 7. Other ___

Number of years with this organization?

- 1. 0-1 ___
- 2. 1-2 ___
- 3. 3-5 ___
- 4. 6-10 ___
- 5. 10-15 ___
- 6. 15+ ___

I am the senior communications decision maker for my organization.

- 1. Yes ___
- 2. No ___

If no, how many levels are you removed from the top.

- 1. One level below ___
- 2. Two levels below ___
- 3. Three or more levels below ___
- 4. I make decisions for a business or product line ___
- 5. I execute tactics for a business, product line or corporate entity ___

I would classify my job responsibilities primarily as:

- 1. Advertising/Branding ___
- 2. Community Relations ___
- 3. Executive Communications ___
- 4. HR/Benefits Communications ___
- 5. Government Relations ___
- 6. Internal Communications (employee) ___
- 7. Investor Relations ___
- 8. Media Relations ___
- 9. Marketing ___
- 10. Other ___

#

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses will enhance our understanding of how communication practices impact the six sigma process and the perceptions of measurement on communications. If you would like to obtain a final copy of this report, fill out the below information. Please note, the data below will not be used to identify you and will be stored separately from the survey results.

Yes, I would like an electronic copy of the survey results —

No, thank you —

If yes, please fill out the below info:

Name _____

Organization _____ (optional)

Email _____