

Best efforts are killing us!

THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR KNOWLEDGE.

In my last blog I wrote about Dr. W. Edwards Deming's "system of profound knowledge." He always insisted that there is no substitute for knowledge. Recently, I experienced a situation that really drove that point home.

A six sigma black belt who serves as the Director of Quality for one of my clients called me. He wanted my assistance in defining KPI's (key performance indicators, or key measures) for performance. I asked, "For process performance?" He replied, "No, for people's performance. We want to apply six sigma in our performance management [appraisal] system." I told him he's wasting his time; it can't be done.

He disagreed and said that they had already developed a good KPI for the performance of their software development engineers. It was project performance versus schedule. He said, "This is a critical performance measure and it's easy to get good data." I asked him, "What's the average time it takes to get an ECO (engineering change order) approved in your organization?" He replied, "What?"

I suggested that I was one of his software development engineers and my project requires a change to a validated test procedure. I submit and ECO for approval so I can make the change and proceed with my project. "On the average, how long will my project schedule slip while I'm waiting for the approval?"

The black belt had no earthly idea. He hadn't even considered it. But he was willing to hold engineers' feet to the fire on schedule performance when that schedule could be delayed for weeks awaiting one ECO approval – a factor beyond the control of the engineers! The Quality Director had a six sigma black belt certificate; based on his training in the Define and Measure phases of DMAIC he was putting forth his best efforts to come up with KPI's to measure performance. But, as Deming maintained, "Best efforts are killing us." There is no substitute for knowledge.