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*"What is Six Sigma?", by Peter S. Pande (McGraw-Hill, 2002). "I never dreamed senior management was really going to support our recommendation. But with Six Sigma, and the data to back up our project, they had no choice."*

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### The National Association of Idea Management

is an organization serving professional idea managers. NAIM supports its members in establishing, marketing and promoting the exchange of ideas between employers and employees to create an environment that fosters innovation and collaboration. If you would like to learn more about NAIM, visit our web site at [www.natlideas.org](http://www.natlideas.org) or send an email to [lona@natlideas.org](mailto:lona@natlideas.org)

## Six Sigma Journey

By Praveen Gupta

Turning back the clock to 1986! My boss returns from a trip to Motorola Corporate meetings, and mentions that something more than three sigma is happening. Either he did not really know what exactly it was, or he just pretended his ignorance. In any case, as a young energetic engineer, I started working on something beyond three sigma. After six months or so, I moved to Schaumburg, IL, anxiously waiting to hear more about something "more than three sigma."

As my first assignment in Schaumburg, IL, I was supposed to improve manufacturing yields. Here I met Bill Smith, the inventor of Six Sigma, and had a chance to learn about his breakthrough. Personally speaking, Bill was always smiling, almost ecstatic about whatever he must be thinking in his mind. Evidently, he must have been a wondering mind. Working with Bill, I had a chance to learn about his visionary observations, which were as follows:

1. Typical field failures are nothing but escaping failures from the factory.
2. Properly designed, properly manufactured, and properly operated electronic product will never fail.
3. Manufacturing in year 2000 had to be at virtually perfection level, i.e., Six Sigma level.

I had the privilege to participate in the development or prototyping the Six Sigma methodology. Looking back since 1986, I am amazed how Six Sigma has evolved and become almost an industry in itself. Such an enormous impact of Six Sigma was unimaginable. Figure 1 shows my observations about evolution of Six Sigma. The figure shows distinct changes or contributions to the development of Six Sigma. For example, Mike Harry and Richard Schroeder packaged Six Sigma in the Breakthrough methodology and publicized through their books and success stories, and involving ASQ (American Society of Quality) in the Six Sigma process. ASQ, in turn, developed a standard body of knowledge and established a Certified Six Sigma Black Belt test. Then, Michael George innovatively integrated Six Sigma with Lean principles into Lean Six Sigma, which, supposedly, has achieved tremendous success as well. Still, all these companies implementing Six Sigma could not determine their sigma level in absence of a methodology to just do that. The author developed a methodology, called Six Sigma Business Scorecard, to determine sigma level of a corporation, which is essential to sustain a Six Sigma initiative.

SPC, JIT, TQM, DFM, DOE, CI	Motorola Launched Six Sigma Program	Harry/Schroeder Commercialized Six	ASQ CSSBB Test, Lean Six	Six Sigma Business Scorecard
1980's	1987	1994	2001	2003

The aggressive rate through breakthrough improvement requires innovation. The measure for innovation starts with its basic building block, i.e., the idea management. The idea management, which has been ignored in the past in the name of suggestion programs, must become an imperative for any organization going forward successfully in this information age.

Praveen Gupta is a Six Sigma consultant and trainer at Quality Technology Company ([www.qtcom.com](http://www.qtcom.com)). He has authored several books including his Six Sigma best seller [Six Sigma Business Scorecard](#), and [The Six Sigma Performance Handbook](#). Praveen is a member of NAIM.