

The Dissemination of Six Sigma

Ton van der WIELE*

RSM Erasmus University, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

Jos van IWAARDEN, David POWER

Microsoft, European Operations Centre, Dublin, Ireland

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the intra-organisational diffusion of management innovations, taking Six Sigma as a recent management innovation. The study will focus on Six Sigma implementation among companies operating in Ireland. This paper will add knowledge to the diffusion of management practices (Six Sigma implementation). This has been achieved through a theoretical framework which posited that multinational firms act as a diffusion mechanism for Six Sigma. Intra-organisational diffusion does exist. Taking the example of Dell Computers, it was shown that multinationals do act as a diffusion mechanism – Dell first adopted Six Sigma at US headquarters level and then the practice diffused internally to its Irish subsidiary and subsequently to its suppliers and finally other local firms. However the role of traditional diffusion mechanisms was also highlighted. The analysis of Six Sigma implementation consisted of an online survey of 125 firms. Subsequently a qualitative analysis of Six Sigma implementation was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 13 respondents. The results show that roughly half of respondent firms use Six Sigma. These firms are typically large US multinationals and have been using Six Sigma for 3 years. Firms adopt Six Sigma in response to competitive pressure and for cost/efficiency reasons.

Keywords: Six Sigma, Management, Diffusion, Ireland.