

## IT Service Management News – October 2007 Spotlight Interview

**ITSM News: Can you briefly explain what Six Sigma is for those who may not be familiar?**

**Linh Ho:** Six Sigma is a quality method that focuses on “Critical to Quality” processes in terms of what’s important to the customers and the business, and eliminating defects. Through its DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) model, each of these phases have objectives and techniques that support the improvement effort. Six Sigma was originally applied in manufacturing, but it is now adopted in many industries such as finance and banking, healthcare and government, and in the field of IT service management with considerable success.

**ITSM News: How are organizations applying Six Sigma to IT Service Management (ITSM)?**

**Linh Ho:** Organizations that have applied Six Sigma fall into two main groups: those that opportunistically use some techniques from Six Sigma to measure service quality and improvement, and those that run full Six Sigma projects using the DMAIC model, including certified Master Black Belts, Black Belts and so on. Both utilize Six Sigma to measure and improve the quality of service where it is most important to the business. IT Service Management is an ideal field for Six Sigma, as most data can be collected and analyzed automatically and there are service management products on the market that now include Six Sigma techniques. Therefore, automating data collection, measurement and reporting makes it a lot easier and less intimidating to adopt Six Sigma—whether the company is Six Sigma-committed or not.

**ITSM News: What benefits are organizations seeing from this?**

**Linh Ho:** Six Sigma is proven to provide quantified returns, in terms of cost reduction and increased profit. ITSM organizations can benefit from Six Sigma to reduce IT problems impacting critical business processes (reducing costs to fix problems but also reducing the costs to the business associated with these problems), improve service management processes, and as a result,

Linh C. Ho has 10 years experience in IT Service Management. Linh is a co-author of itSMF's *Six Sigma for IT Management* book and pocket guide. She has written articles and spoken at conferences on the topics of Six Sigma, ITIL and Business Service Management. She holds an Honors Baccalaureate in Commerce,



International Business Management and Management Information Systems from the University of Ottawa. Linh is currently part of Compuware's product marketing team for its IT Service Management solution. Prior to that, she helped Proxima Technology become the first Service Management software vendor to include Six Sigma capabilities, and was an assistant professor of Statistics for Management and Applications of Statistical Methods in Business at the University of Ottawa. Linh is ITIL v3 Foundation Certified and Pragmatic Marketing Certified.

improve IT service quality delivered to the business. In short, Six Sigma helps baseline service quality levels, quantify improvement for return on investment and sustain improvement until further enhancement is required—providing that continual improvement loop for service quality.

**ITSM News: How does Six Sigma relate to ITIL?**

**Linh Ho:** Six Sigma and ITIL are complementary. More so now with ITIL version 3's emphasis on Continual Service Improvement as it recognizes the need to add a quality layer to ITSM, and bringing in proven methods such as Six Sigma and Total Quality Management. Six Sigma complements ITIL by providing tools and techniques to measure, analyze and report on service quality, identify root causes and prioritize improvement where it matters the most to the

customers and business. In short, ITIL establishes consistent ITSM processes, and Six Sigma improves these processes and service quality.

**ITSM News: What are the key Six Sigma techniques applicable to ITSM?**

**Linh Ho:** Key Six Sigma techniques that can be immediately applied to ITSM include the Pareto Chart, Failure Mode and Effects Analysis, Voice of the Customer, Control Chart, and Process Sigma Value to name a few. For example the Pareto Chart applies the 80/20 rule to understand what 20 percent root causes are causing 80 percent of the problems in one critical business process. Another one can be the Control Chart for ongoing measurement and reporting of service level agreement performance or business key performance indicators behavior to detect any abnormalities—taking a proactive approach to manage service level quality without the need to set thresholds manually. These techniques already exist in some service management products, including Compuware’s Vantage.

**ITSM News: Are there other quality practices that are related, and if so, how does Six Sigma differ?**

**Linh Ho:** Yes, there’s a plethora of quality methods or practices. Total Quality Management (TQM), ISO 9000, Lean Sigma and more. Six Sigma’s quality improvement process differs by focusing on eliminating defects and on what is “Critical to Quality” for customers and the business. Lean focuses on eliminating waste and ISO 9000 is a quality standard. Six Sigma has great mindshare of the business and ITIL of IT; together, they can help further integrate IT and the business to bridge the gap.

**ITSM News: How can people learn more about adopting Six Sigma for IT?**

**Linh Ho:** There are a number of published articles and information on the web, but more specifically, the following are also available:

- itSMF has published a book called *Six Sigma for IT Management* relating to this topic (link: <http://www.amazon.com/Sigma-Management-Sven-Boer-Author/dp/9077212302/> )
- Leading service provider Wipro has a white paper relating to adopting Six Sigma for service quality improvement. (link: [http://www.compuware.com/products/vantage/151\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm](http://www.compuware.com/products/vantage/151_ENG_HTML.htm) )
- Compuware Vantage provides a service management product with Six Sigma techniques embedded for automated measurement, analysis and improvement. (link: [http://www.compuware.com/products/vantage/6529\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm](http://www.compuware.com/products/vantage/6529_ENG_HTML.htm) )