

3m's conundrum of efficiency and creativity

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Introduction 3M is an innovative and creative company that flourished since 1930 with the invention of masking tape and again in the 1950's with Scotchgard the fabric protector. Then during a glue that was invented that was considered a failure in the 1970's someone came up with the idea of taking that glue solution and using it on the back of paper to hold the paper to anything. So the invention of the post-it came out and the business really took off. In the 2000 the newly appointed CEO James McNerney implemented the Six Sigma management style.

He did this because he felt the company was stale and not growing as much as he felt. This new management style is "designed to identify problems in work processes, and then use rigorous measurement to reduce variation, eliminate defects, and increase efficiency" (Nelson and Quick, 2011-363). The very things that some believe got 3M where they were, McNerney wanted to streamline the company and eliminate the wastefulness. Initially his idea caused a growth of twenty-two percent annually but not for long.

McNerney was committed to Six Sigma and imbedded it deeply into 3M until his departure in 2005. Some experts believe that McNerney, by implementing the Six Sigma program into the company stifled the creativity and did not allow for failure or trial and error. This seemed to many a contradiction because the post-it, that brought 3M to forefront, was in fact a glue that originally did not work but because of the latitude afforded in creativity it allowed the engineers to experiment with it for something else.

Issue Addressed Whether or not Six Sigma is the way to go for 3M?

With the 15 percent rule of the Richard McKnight established in the earlier days of the company, creativity and innovation was in abundance. When

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James McNerney took over as the CEO, he brought Six Sigma to the company. Six Sigma is the “measure of quality that strives for near perfection” (Nelson and Quick, 2011-364) Sixty percent of all corporate Six Sigma programs fail to produce desired outcomes and results. Creativity worked in creating masking tape, Scotchgard fabric protector, and Post-it Notes. Six Sigma has not produced such large scale products for 3M.

Answering the Questions 1. Relative advantage of Six Sigma

- oTime efficient
- & Cost effective - eliminate the extra ideas and create the “right idea the first time”
- oCustomer loyalty
- oReduction of incidents
- oLower costs for providing goods and services

-Relative disadvantage Six Sigma

- oCreativity and innovation decreases due to the lack of opportunity to come up with ideas.
- oComplicated process to learn and keep going
- oRisk of failure / fear of the unknown

Using Six Sigma 3M's programmed decisions are well thought out and researched.

On the other hand, their non-programmed decisions could be better because they lack the ingenuity and inputs of employees that drive new ideas. So I have to believe that because of the rigidness of the management style does not allow for the employees to create new products and bring forth the new ideas. While I am all for putting processes in place and improving effectiveness and eliminating waste, I have never been a fan of the Six Sigma process. I feel the Six Sigma, just as the experts believe, takes away the creative processes and does not allow enough flexibility for research and development. Society and business are always changing.

Consumers develop needs for new products and preferences for new styles. Businesses look for new technologies that give them the competitive edge

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(Pace - 95). " I have to believe that research and development are the keys to staying power and any company can come up with an idea and launch a company but true staying power is coming up with new ideas and the Six Sigma is too rigid to allow for that. Intuition and creativity should play the biggest role in 3M. However, with Six Sigma these two characteristics are very limited. M does not get tons of new ideas from all over in the company. Preference to work would be with a company where decision making leaves room for risk and failure in search of innovation. Collaboration of multiple ideas is what created a lot of successful companies and products like Apple and Twitter. Conclusions I believe if 3M wants to grow as a company that it needs to go back to what made 3M the well known company that it is today; the leading edge technologies that were invented during the free time that was allotted for experimentation.

Allow the people and engineers do the thinking and provide the latitude to experiment and give those people the opportunity to create the next big product to grow the firm and take it to the future. I feel that 3M is just in survival mode and has not really come out with anything big since the implementation of the Six Sigma program. You cannot hire great ideas or innovation, but you can hire people who have those characteristics and provide them the tools to do just that. Six Sigma has proven to make 3M profitable in the beginning but for the long run it has hurt 3M. M has not proven to make a substantial difference from the creativity and innovative ideas and processes from before Six Sigma's time.