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### Six Sigma: Definition and underlying theory

Roger G. Schroeder<sup>a</sup>   ... Adrian S. Choo<sup>c, 3</sup>  **Show more**<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jom.2007.06.007>[Get rights and content](#)

#### Abstract

Six Sigma has been gaining momentum in industry; however, academics have conducted little research on this emerging phenomenon. Understanding Six Sigma first requires providing a conceptual definition and identifying an underlying theory. In this paper we use the grounded theory approach and the scant literature available to propose an initial definition and theory of Six Sigma. Our research argues that although the tools and techniques in Six Sigma are strikingly similar to prior approaches to quality management, it provides an organizational structure not previously seen. This emergent structure for quality management helps organizations more rigorously control process improvement activities, while at the same time creating a context that enables problem exploration between disparate organizational members. Although Six Sigma provides benefits over prior approaches to quality management, it also creates new challenges for researchers and practitioners.

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## Keywords

Quality management; Six Sigma; Organizational issues; Case/field study

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1 Tel.: +1 612 626 8632.

2 Tel.: +1 952 380 0778.

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