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## Editorial

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**Biographical notes:** Christopher Seow is a Senior Lecturer in Operations Management at the University of East London Business School, UK and was invited in 2006 as a Visiting Lecturer in Performance Management at the European Centre for Total Quality Management based at the University of Bradford, UK. He is a Certified Master Black Belt in Lean Six Sigma Quality and Operational Excellence and Certified Manager in Project Management of The Harrington Institute. He has worked in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the UK and has over 18 years of hands-on experience. This covers all phases of operations management in major organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors, and in culturally diverse metropolitan areas.

Professor Jiju Antony is currently leading the Centre for Research in Six Sigma and Process Excellence (CRISSPE) at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland. He is also Deputy Director of the Strathclyde Institute for Operations Management. He received a BE in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Kerala, South India, an MEngSc in Quality and Reliability Engineering from the National University of Ireland and a PhD in Quality Control for Manufacturing from the University of Portsmouth, UK. His work experience includes two years as a Maintenance Engineer, three years as a Quality/Reliability Manager and seven years as a Quality Engineering Consultant for a number of multinational companies such as Nokia, Parker Pen, Vickers Systems, Siemens, Rolls-Royce, Bosch, Motorola, Philips and a large number of local SMEs. He has published over 120 refereed papers and five textbooks in the areas of reliability engineering, design of experiments, Taguchi methods, Six Sigma, total quality management and statistical process control.

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Literature in the realms of process improvement has, to a large degree, shown evidence of maturity, and yet organisations large and small still report failure in reaping the fruits of such investments. It is ironic that after all this while, success, failure or sustainability of process improvement initiatives, be it labelled 'Total Quality' or 'Kaizen' or 'Toyota Production Systems' or 'Six Sigma', rests on people's understanding that return on such investments is not merely a case of deploying the tools and techniques, but of diffusing them through the 'softer' side of management – through the hearts and minds of the people that make the organisation and the market.

This suite of five papers in this special issue is a demonstration of that perspective. Snee, in his article 'Getting better all the time: the future of business improvement methodology', commences this special issue by advocating that the next generation of improvement methodology is no longer a mere suite of methodologies but needs to be a holistic amalgamation of best practices of methodology, management systems, tools, metrics and goals. Reinforcing Snee's assertion, Yeung's paper 'Six Sigma paradigm shift' affirms that organisations should look beyond the methodology to the *whole package* in distilling the underpinning and purpose of pursuing any of the process improvement initiatives.

These issues are not just the premise of large organisations where the majority of the literatures on Six Sigma/Process improvement tend to be published. Increasingly, such initiatives are growing amongst SMEs, as Maneesh Kumar's paper, 'Critical success factors and hurdles to Six Sigma implementation: the case of a UK manufacturing SME', proves. Kumar's paper highlights similar considerations from a UK manufacturing SME perspective.

This collection of papers concludes with a discussion of the above standpoint through two case studies. Sarkar shares an introspection of continuous improvement methodology deployment in a steel plant in India through his paper 'Designing sustainable strategies for continuous improvement deployment programme: lessons from a steel plant'. An appealing contribution in this paper is Sarkar's use of the Failure Mode Effect Analysis (FMEA) tool to illustrate the criticalities and issues for successful deployment of improvement initiatives.

In the second of the two case studies, Annamalai shows that as the process improvement movement matures from Six Sigma in manufacturing processes to that of design, the complexity in realising the low-hanging fruits might be problematic and would prove too incomprehensible for the masses, thus necessitating the quest for simplicity in deployment and execution. Annamalai illustrates this in his paper 'First Time Right – a metric for foolproof design,' through tracking a more basic metric called 'First Time Right' (FTR), which measures the number of instances when the first design worked successfully.

This Editorial concludes with my thanks to Jiju Antony, the Editor-in-Chief of *International Journal of Six Sigma and Competitive Advantage*, for enabling me to guest edit this special issue; to Mrs. Barbara Curran, Journal Manager of *IJSSCA*, for processing it to print; and to the authors and reviewers for enriching this body of knowledge.