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Six Sigma For Value Creation: An Interventionist Approach

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The literature of Six Sigma mainly concerns with its underlying concepts and success stories written by consultants or people with vested interests, which raises questions about their validity. Hence, there is a genuine need to conduct a study to investigate the extent to which Six Sigma influences organizational performance and to document the details of Six Sigma implementation empirically. As with other innovations that diffuse through time, this study of Six Sigma implementation in a Malaysian automotive company was carried out using a longitudinal case study method in order to investigate the reasons for adopting it, how it was implemented and what the consequences were for the company. This interventionist research, in which the researcher was an active participant in finding solutions to the case organization's problems, used the theory of diffusion to provide the necessary theoretical framework to conduct the study. The objective of this paper was to examine the extent of Six Sigma implementation and value creation for the organization and for customers. The study also identified the key factors that influenced or impeded the implementation of Six Sigma in the case organization. An in-depth mixed research method was adopted: the research began with a qualitative

method using an interventionist approach involving a detailed description drawn from participant observations, interviews with selected informants, and review of documents and archival records. This was followed by a quantitative method through an industry survey to confirm and further extend the findings from the qualitative study. The findings have provided insights into how Six Sigma was diffused through the case company and later was used together with other best practices to transform the case company from the worst performing vendor to the best performing one. This study also provided a detailed account of how the case company deployed Six Sigma principles to achieve a breakthrough and sustainable performance improvements. Most importantly, this study has shown how Six Sigma was implemented in a simple, practical and yet economical way with a relatively small amount of investment. The implementation and practice of Six Sigma has created considerable value to the

stakeholders of the case company and to the company itself extending beyond the tangible benefits that were derived from its implementation. The findings of the case company will provide important insights for organizations which are contemplating how to introduce new ideas or initiatives like Six Sigma into their social system in order to enhance cost and quality competitiveness. The findings from the industry study, however, revealed low level of Six Sigma adoption within the automotive industry at the time the study was carried out. The findings also showed that Six Sigma practice is very much at the infancy stage in the Malaysian automotive industry. Perhaps, other companies within the industry require more time and motivations such as demand from customers to implement Six Sigma or other innovations.