

Kaizen

Kaizen Defined

Kaizen approaches productivity improvement. In Japanese, Kaizen means “small, incremental, continuous improvement,” and the English translation is “continuous or continual improvement.” It is a process that, when done correctly, humanizes the workplace, eliminates unnecessarily hard work (both mental and physical), teaches people how to do rapid experiments using the scientific method, and how to see and eliminate waste in business processes.



The objectives of Kaizen include eliminating waste, or activities that add cost but not value, just-in-time delivery, production load leveling of amount and types, standardized work, paced moving lines and right-sized equipment,. Basically, Kaizen takes processes, systems, products, and services apart then rebuilds them in a better way. Kaizen goes hand-in-hand with that of quality control circles, although it is not limited to quality assurance.

Kaizen Applied

Outside experts can help get Kaizen started. They work in your facility to identify problems that those close to the work may not see. After instigation, employees can then continue implementing Kaizen works and experiencing its benefits.

Key Elements

- Structured approach – A formal schedule including kick-off and a final presentation to management in addition to Kaizen Team Leader updates
- Aggressive objectives –Encouraging the team to stretch beyond its comfort zone to achieve goals

- Short time-period – A Kaizen Event typically lasts two to five days, plus time to follow up
- Full-time team membership – Team members are full-time for the duration of the Kaizen Event, but they are not expected to perform their normal duties during the process

Employee training and communication, combined with direct involvement by the management, is critical to Kaizen's success. For example, a manager spending a week on the shop floor working with employees and encouraging them to develop suggestions will expedite the arrival of benefits as opposed to distant leadership. A manager should also ensure that employees see their suggestions addressed immediately instead of allowing their input to disappear into a management "black hole."

Kaizen does not view problems as negative but rather sees them as positive opportunities for improvement. To implement change, Kaizen finds, reports, and fixes problems. This program encourages rewarding employees who expose inefficiencies and other issues. Kaizen is about taking action to generate suggestions then implementing productive ideas as soon as possible.

Kaizen results in improved productivity and quality, better safety, faster delivery, lower costs and greater customer satisfaction. Furthermore, employees find work to be easier and more enjoyable—resulting in higher employee morale and lower turn-over.

Outcomes include

- Reduction in waste in areas such as inventory, waiting times, transportation, worker motion, employee skills, over production, excess quality, and in-processes
- Improvement in space utilization, product quality, use of capital, communications, production capacity, and employee retention

- Immediate results. Instead of focusing on large, capital-intensive improvements, Kaizen focuses on creative investments that continually solve large numbers of small problems. The real power of Kaizen is in the on-going process of continually making small improvements that improve overall processes and reduce waste

Kaizen at Thomas Group

For most American companies, the key Kaizen's success involves a significant change in the corporate culture. The attitudes of employees, from top management down to new hires, will likely need to change. Employees must recognize Kaizen's benefits and not view it as management dictation. Resistance to positive change will hinder the process, so enthusiasm expedites the beneficial outcomes.

Thomas Group best practices reveal that the only way to truly understand the intent, meaning, and power of Kaizen is through direct participation. Kaizen requires full participation. People of all levels in an organization, from the CEO down, as well as external suppliers and customers if needed, play a role in its implementation. The format of a Kaizen program can adjust to individuals, suggestion systems, small groups, or large groups. 