



## Kaizen

**What is Kaizen?** - In simple terms Kaizen is Japanese for 'a change for better', which results in 'continuous improvement'. Kaizen ideology can be traced back to the 1980's; Kaizen was first adopted in the West with the influx of Japanese car manufacturers brought a wave of new thinking.

Kaizen logic was first enshrined in written text with Masaaki Imai's book '*KAIZEN - The Key To Japan's Competitive Success*' (1996

) this book showed what the fundamental Kaizen logic is. We shall be exploring the issues discussed in this text.

Kaizen uses the Japanese logic of bringing improvements internally from within the workplace; this goes against the European ethics of using external sources such as consultants to improve processes.

### **Kaizen Benefits**

- Problems are identified at source, and resolved.
- Small improvements which are realized can add up to major benefits for the business
- Improvements, which lead to changes in the business quality, cost and delivery of products, mean a greater level of customer satisfaction, and business growth.
- By involving employees in looking at their environment to bring about change, results in improved morale as people begin to find work easier and more enjoyable.

### **Kaizen Training**

In order to implement Kaizen, a team needs to be set up to look at a workplace. The employees within the Kaizen team need to be trained in Kaizen logic. The underlying of Kaizen is that it makes employees become aware that by using their skills to improve a process, results in the business becoming more successful, which lends itself to meaning more job security for the employee.

Kaizen requires bringing employees together to look at their jobs, sections, and processes, to realize changes that will help performance. Whereas lean manufacturing looked at production issues, Kaizen can be applied to any business.

Japanese production systems are inherently based on the logic that the employer will always look after the employee, they can be applied to Western companies, but we have to bear in mind the social differences between the cultures and not look merely at short term gains. Kaizen can be a good medium for improving employee-employer relationships.

Due to western cultural differences between Japan and the West, it is advisable to have a team leader within your Kaizen teams. This is to ensure the team behaves the way you want it to. Why? Well if you take a group of closely working together individuals and tell them to stop working and look at their environment, they will need someone to coax and guide them to bring about change, or else the team ethic will disintegrate.

The team leader will during all the Kaizen sessions be an equal member of the team, whilst at the same time, the team leader will provide back-up support to the team. The team leader will be the individual who ensures employees pursue the Kaizen ethics by having regular visits with the Kaizen team. Ideally the team leader should come from within the employee teams, but it could be advisable to have a number of employees from different departments of the company trained up in Kaizen logic and then placed in completely different environments to lead teams.

The responsibility of the success or failure should be placed on each Kaizen team, please bear in mind Kaizen is a long term strategy, which means employees will on regular intervals not be working in a value added manner, but the work they are doing is for improving productivity in the long run.

The need for employees spending a lot of time in the Kaizen teams needs to be explained to their immediate superiors, the business has to accept that Kaizen is for it's benefit.