

KAIZEN

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ABSTRACT

In an ever-growing, demanding and changing world, we need to understand that the pursuit for excellence is endless. There needs to be a process of continuous improvement. This being the basis of my paper, I would elaborate on certain principles from the management theory that can be practiced at individual level. The process of continuous improvement at individual level when practiced by many in an organization develops a CULTURE, where QUALITY becomes a habit. CULTURE builds a successful and healthy workplace. I present KAIZEN and other principles that can help implement KAIZEN as a self-improving technique.

INTRODUCTION

We will see some principles that help us implement KAIZEN. Kaizen is all about developing standards and then continually improving on those standards. We are the best people who know our strengths and weaknesses; what we do right and what can be further improved. If we look back at our routine task and assess, we would discover many areas where we could do much better.

LET US UNDERSTAND KAIZEN

Kaizen is a Japanese term which comes from the Japanese words 改 ("kai") which means "change" or "to correct" and 善 ("zen") which means "good". It's a system that involves every employee - from upper management to the lowest tier of employees in an organization. It's small improvement on a regular basis. This is not a once a month or once a year activity. It is continuous; when practiced would become a habit. Kaizen is not about making major changes but little changes on a regular basis: always improving productivity, safety and effectiveness by way of elimination of waste. Kaizen is making small changes and seeking improvements wherever possible. Improvement comes with constant learning and sharing knowledge.

Kaizen is a system of continuous improvement that can be applied in both personal and professional life. It is a concept that is applied in every aspect of life. We will now see how we can implement kaizen at business undertaking with an example which pertains to the tasks of generating Clinical Study report (CSR).

IMPLEMENT KAIZEN – SOME PRINCIPLES

- DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME
- 5-WHY METHOD
- 5-S METHOD

We will see 3 simple, yet powerful ways of implementing KAIZEN, in detail below.

DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

These are very powerful words; a quality management theory that defect prevention is more advantageous and cost effective than defect detection and associated rework. Easier said than done...Isn't it?

How many times have we done a task and had to redo it again since it was not up to standards the first time and we didn't give it our full effort?

We mostly come up with the reasoning that we didn't have enough time. If there was no time to do it right the first time, think about the time that we need to put in to redo it again; this time, the efforts and time have doubled

Think again...would you still like to continue or change the way we work?

Remember that not doing a task “right the first time” often leads to more work.

What do we do? Let us associate every task that we do with a metric. This metric can then be evaluated each time we do the same task in a continuous manner. Striving to get things right the first time will save lot of time and effort that is involved in re-work updating/correcting the things already done. So we monitor the task on a self-calibrated metric on a continuous basis which will help us do things perfect the first time itself. This approach will ensure that we are on a cycle of continuous improvement thereby providing the best quality possible.

Example

Programmers from clinical industry deal with programming and/or validation of clinical study reports. The comments that we receive on the report generated by us can be treated as the metric to evaluate how well we are performing. As a validator, we could look at the metric as the updates that still were required to the reports post the validation which should have been captured. With the “Do it right the first time attitude”, our goal is to work towards trying to get the number of comments down to zero. This process of continuous monitoring would inturn make us a Quality performer.

5-WHY METHOD

We all would have experienced failure at some point in time or are still experiencing failures at one of the other tasks we are handling. One of the easiest and quick ways to assess and understand the root cause of such failure is the “5-Why” method.

How it works – You look at any failed event and ask why it occurred. The answer to the first question often leads to another question. So, we turn the answer to the first question as the next Why question. The next answer then becomes the third Why question and so on. Asking Why 5 times in succession is believed to uncover the underlying root cause of the event. You may have to continue to ask beyond 5-Why if required, until we find the root cause (7-Why method supersedes 5-Why). This method is being suggested here as just a self improving technique. We need to be aware that the responses to the answers are very much restricted to our own perception. So do note to carefully apply this as a self-improving technique whenever required.

Example

We may have led projects and experienced struggle to meet the project deadlines without the compromise on quality. We need to assess and analyze this experience carefully at our end to ensure we avoid the struggle next time. So, we take the 5-Why approach.

Why did the struggle happen

Answers could be

Unforeseen challenges that came up during the eleventh hour

Planned internal milestone slipped and turned difficult to catch upon later

All efforts were in line as planned and as expected. However, there was a situation that demanded more time. The right communication at the right time to buy more time slipped.

No proper co-ordination and communication between the team

An issue, though was caught well before time, was not resolved until later

If the answer turned out to be the last one, our next why would be

Why the issue, though was caught well before time, was not resolved until later

Answers again could be many, listing some

The concerned person was not available to respond at that time

The issue was raised with the concerned individual but there was no response on the resolution status

until later

If the answer to the why turns to be the second one, our next why would be

Why was there no response on the resolution status of the issue after being raised with the concerned individual until late?

Answers again could be

The concerned person raised the issue further and got it resolved, but did not communicate

The concerned person raised the issue with the vendor who supplied the data but did not get the required details

I did not follow-up with the concerned person to understand the resolution status until it was late

I end with 3-why's here in this scenario concluding that the entire struggle happened with the project as the lead missed to do follow up on an issue that was raised well before time. This issue, hence, had to be investigated at the end moment causing all stress.

We should try and assess on a continuous basis, the cause for failure on every activity and may use this methodology to identify the root cause and thereby act on it quickly. There are times when we may be putting in lot of efforts reaping no benefit. This could mean that our efforts were not in the right direction. Continuous assessment and improvement will make us work better each day.

Note: 5-WHY's simplicity leads people to use it, but it can be deceiving if not applied correctly. The trick lies in developing the ability to ask good Why questions in succession so that they do not end up fixing problems that did not cause the failure incident and miss the problems that led to it. Also, we need to make sure that we ask the most appropriate and convincing Why's.

5-S METHOD

This method focuses on organizing and managing the workplace by eliminating the wastes thereby creating a conducive working environment. A well organized place leads to improved productivity, efficiency and quality work. The 5S stand for the first five letters of Japanese words SEIRI, SEITON, SEISO, SEIKETSU and SHITSUKE. It's a structured program to systematically achieve total organization, cleanliness, and standardization in the workplace. This is not just meant for the physical organization of the place but also the organization of the information systems that we use.

Below are the 5'S -

SEIRI – Sort – Ensure everything left in the work place is work related

SEITON – Set in Order – Ensure the necessary items are placed in an easily accessible place so that less time and effort is spent on retrieval

SEISO – Shine – Ensure that the workplace is clean and everything is where it belongs

SEIKETSU – Standardize – Develop a method or practice to maintain cleanliness on a continuous basis

SHITSUKE – Sustain –Maintain the standards/practice developed

DETAILS

SEIRI

Identify what you need

Discard all unrelated, unusable materials in the workplace

Store all tools and items at designated place

Classify the items that are available prioritizing them as below based on the frequency of usage.

Low (once in a year) - Keep them away

Medium (once in a month) - Keep them together

High (daily) - Store them at an easily accessible place

Example

Non-required emails can be archived.

Old Project related documents on the local machine can be moved and renamed or deleted if not required.

SEITON

Focus on efficiently storing the left over items after the unnecessary clutter has been removed from the work place. Arrange the items based on the extent of usage such that the most frequently used items are the easiest and quickest to locate.

Example

Project related emails – The current ongoing project folders can be kept in inbox and the rest could be archived.

SEISO

Ensure to keep the work place clean on a daily basis. Identify the cause of waste causing elements to eliminate the need to clean.

Example

Allotting a specific time on a daily basis to segregate the emails will avoid piling up of the same and eliminate the extra effort the next day.

SEIKETSU

Once the first three 5'S has been implemented, develop schedules, procedures and practices to simplify this process of maintaining cleanliness in the workplace. On a continuous basis, assess the use of items and discard the ones not required.

Example

Applying rules on emails will direct the project related emails in the specific folder as per the rule. This helps to retrieve information related to a project faster. Other non-project specific emails wherein the rule cannot be applied, classify and manually push into the appropriate folder on a daily basis.

SHITSUKE

Most of us are handle the above 4 steps right. However, gradually, we tend to get a little relaxed and miss to maintain the newly adopted method of cleanliness on a daily basis. This leads to distress at later point in time. After the first 4 steps are implemented once, we have to commit towards making this practice a new way of life and make sure that we don't return to the comfort zone of falling back to the old ways of doing things gradually. We should also be looking for continuous improvement of the existing 4 way implemented and make the necessary corrections in the 4 steps as needed making it a new Better way.

5 S is a continuous process of improvement as we implement it on a daily basis and keep improving it as and when we see the scope for the same.

CONCLUSION

All the above principles ‘**DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME**’, ‘**5-WHY**’ and ‘**5-S**’ method, are to be followed in a continuous manner as they provide way for betterment each day. We need to understand that implementing Kaizen through living these principles at an individual level can change our culture.

At an organization level, having the right Process is the Key thing to build an effective organization. Continuously looking for ways to improve the “PROCESS” will develop a tight system that will lessen the scope for dissatisfaction in business that the organization is into. Continuous improvement at all process elements like Recruitment, Training, Production, Testing, Review, Finance etc will ensure that quality is achieved in every aspect of the organization, giving way for building a BETTER CULTURE every day.

These principles can be extended outside the workplace to lead a BETTER personal life.

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