



P-Glossary



Kaizen

Kaizen is known as the single most important concept in Japanese management and it has been a key to the competitive success of Japanese manufacturing industries.

Kaizen is a Japanese word meaning "improvement," that calls for never-ending efforts to improve, inviting each and every one in the organization to take part. Problem-solving under the *kaizen* concept is seen as a cross-functional, systematic, and collaborative approach. It is a strategy that puts every member of the organization, from top management down, continuously on the watch for improvement options. This is done using systematic reviews and auditing procedures, brainstorming, and group decision tools to see where improvement opportunities may lie. All operations of the organization are subject to improvement, and the *kaizen* approach is that nothing has improved sufficiently to stop improving it.

Kaizen approaches employ various tools including 5S, quality control circles, total quality control, total preventive maintenance, just-in-time inventory, standard work, and automation, among others. These have all been useful in improving the three productivity dimensions of cost, quality, and speed. For example, the core concept of *kaizen* is to eliminate *muri* (overload), *muda* (waste), and *mura* (inconsistency) from the worksite through efficient utilization of labor, materials, and equipment.

See also: 5S or Good Housekeeping; Toyota Production System; Lean Production System
