



## Kaizen – Just what is it anyway?

The term Kaizen is made of two Japanese words, “kai,” meaning “change,” and “zen,” meaning “good.” It’s a philosophy of continual improvement, emphasizing copious employee participation, in which processes are continuously evaluated and improved in terms of time, resources, quality, and other aspects relevant to the process. The general idea is gradual, daily, consistent improvements over time.

Kaizen is often confused with Kaizen Events. They are not the same. Kaizen events are activities in which temporary teams are established to improve given processes. They usually meet for one week or less. In contrast, Kaizen is intended to be incorporated by all in the organization as a daily approach to the improvement of the entire value stream. There are many types of Kaizen events used to resolve different kinds of problems in various processes. Each event has certain tools which may be used. Some more common events are summarized below. This list is not exhaustive. The key factor each type of event has in common is the identification and elimination of waste through the use of lean tools such as time studies, spaghetti maps, process flow maps, visual management, root cause analysis, etc.

Do you have an idea for improving a process, but need buy-in and support from other functions? Perhaps a cross-functional Kaizen team should tackle it. Discuss your idea with your local lean resource to determine if it’s a problem which could be resolved within a Kaizen event context.

Type of Kaizen Event	Where Used	Purpose	Result
5S	Anywhere	Organize an area (office, shop, lab, maintenance, etc.)	Safer operation, lowest cycle time, highest quality
Standard Work, Takt Time/Cycle Time	Anywhere	Define best method for performing work	Safer operation, lowest cycle time, highest quality
R3 (Residual Risk Reduction)	Anywhere	Proactively improve safety by reducing risk in an area	Safer operation
Visual Management	Anywhere	Communicate process information clearly and quickly	Understanding of goals and progress toward goals
Kanban, Supermarkets, Plan for Every Part	Shopfloor, usually	Gain better control of materials, reduce work content for planners/schedulers	Less downtime due to parts shortages, fewer employees moving parts around, less dependency on forklifts, less WIP
Single Minute Exchange of Dies	Anywhere	Reduce changeover or implementation time	Shopfloor: Shorter runs, less WIP, more uptime Office: Smoother implementation of new process with fewer problems after launch
Value Stream Mapping	Anywhere	Understand everything about our value stream from supplier through customers	Plan for removing waste identified on the map
Business Process Kaizen	Office areas	Reduce cycle time of business processes	Streamlined processes with clear handoffs and decision-making criteria, less rework
Total Productive Maintenance	Shopfloor, usually	Reduce unplanned and major downtime	Improved Overall Equipment Effectiveness, improved delivery, better planning capability
Green	Anywhere	Identify ways to eliminate "green" wastes	Less wasted energy, water, garbage, etc.