



Getting process improvement results in half the time

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Background

Traditional process improvement programs using lean six sigma can deliver strong results, by focusing on customer needs, eliminating waste and reducing variation in products and services. The main drawback has always been waiting for projects to get completed, so the benefits can start. This is especially true when a company already has a “can do” culture used to solving problems quickly, and now finds that lean six sigma projects take 6-12 months to achieve the results. Fortunately, the lean toolkit has a solution called “kaizen” that cuts the time in half.

What is Kaizen?

Kaizen is a compound Japanese word from “kai” meaning “change” and “zen” meaning “for the good”. So kaizen literally translates as “good change”. RCI Consulting defines a kaizen event as an accelerated application of Lean Six Sigma (Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control), to get results in about half the time. The project has three stages: pre-work, kaizen event and follow-up. There is a strong bias for action to complete the project faster, but there is also more risk since only basic analysis tools are used.



Pre-work: Define and parts of the Measure phase are completed in preparation, as well as detailed agendas and logistics planning for the kaizen week. This work is done with a small core team, and starts during the first week of training.

Kaizen event: The rest of Measure, Analyze and Improve phases are completed. This lasts a full week (five days). The team develops solutions and a detailed implementation plan by Wednesday afternoon / Thursday morning that can be reviewed and approved by sponsor. The remainder of the week is used to start executing as much of the implementation plan as possible with the team present (typically 40-60% by the end of the kaizen event).

Follow-up: Control phase is completed. Our experience is that at least 80% of the implementation plan can be completed within one to two months of the kaizen, which gets most of the benefits quickly.



How are Kaizen Leaders Developed?

There are three steps in our approach to developing Kaizen Leaders: candidate selection, classroom training and coaching through one to two cycles of projects run as kaizen events.

Candidate and project selection

It takes a certain kind of person to facilitate kaizen events. Kaizen events require strong facilitation skills, leadership, flexibility and lateral thinking. RCI has developed a list of criteria to evaluate potential kaizen leaders, and works with clients on vetting and interviewing candidates. The goal is to identify 6, 9 or 12 candidates for each wave of the kaizen leader program.

In addition, not everyone can effectively run a week-long workshop. Kaizen events require very strong facilitation skills, leadership, flexibility and lateral thinking. RCI has developed a list of criteria to evaluate potential kaizen leaders, and will work with clients on vetting and sometimes interviewing candidates.

Each candidate needs to have a reasonably scoped project that will provide meaningful improvement. Good project candidates include an engaged process owner, an urgent business or customer need, and a process that can be measurably improved. Any kaizen that requires more than ten team members may need to be evaluated for scope, especially as a training project.

Classroom training

Kaizen Leader only requires two weeks of training. The focus is on practical tools and exercises to prepare for and lead a kaizen event. Teams of three kaizen leaders each will sit together and work on a shared project throughout the class. Over 25% of the class time is devoted to pre-work for the actual projects that will be run as kaizen events by the attendees. In addition to traditional topics from lean six sigma, kaizen leader training includes tools and practice for pre-work, kaizen event facilitation and follow-up.

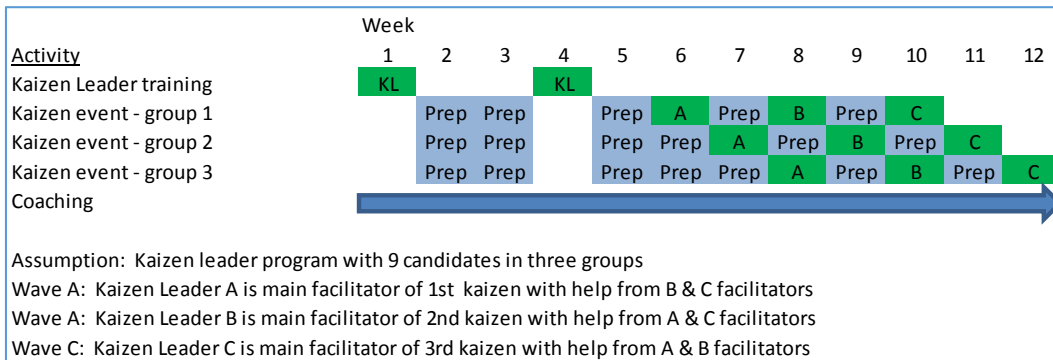


Projects that require more advanced statistical tools are supported by one on one coaching until the organization develops its own capability.

Note: after completing the kaizen leader program, most later attend two additional weeks of Black Belt training. Many companies prefer this modular approach to developing Black Belts, since they can complete their first wave of projects after Kaizen Leader training and continue with Black Belt training to gain the full lean six sigma toolset.

Coaching

Coaching for kaizen leaders starts during Kaizen Leader training and continues through successful facilitation of their project as a kaizen event. Below is an example timeline for nine candidates and their projects. The coach will help with preparation for all projects and will be present during events, to guide the new kaizen leaders through the tools and challenges that can occur.



Conclusions

Kaizen is a useful tool to accelerate some lean six sigma projects, and get results in about half the time. It takes a certain kind of person to facilitate kaizen events, which are 40 hour working meeting that rely heavily on the facilitator to keep the momentum, and must also be supported by empowered teams and an engaged process owner. Kaizen leader training helps, by providing the tips and tricks needed to manage the project using kaizen. In addition, providing support expert coaching during the first few cycles of learning helps the kaizen leaders prepare and also act as a safety during the kaizen week to remove barriers and ensure success.

RCI consulting experts have over twenty years of experience using rapid continuous improvement methods to execute strategy, train teams and deliver hard savings to the bottom line. If you would like to learn more about our Kaizen Leader program, please contact us at 800.732.9394 or visit our website www.rapidci.com.