

## Explanation of the Kaizen Event and how it can be used as part of an overall LEAN implementation strategy.

Most people who have some familiarity with LEAN manufacturing or the Toyota Production System (TPS) have heard of the term Kaizen. This is the Japanese phrase for “Continuous Improvement” relating to slow, incremental but constant improvement. However, in the world of Western management methodology, the word Kaizen is more often associated with a blitz or short-term event.

Such events rapidly implement workcells, improve setups, or streamline processes. A better word for this activity may be Kaikaku, a Japanese term meaning radical overhaul of an activity to eliminate all waste and create greater value. Legendary leaders at Toyota, Taiichi Ohno and Shigeo Shingo, developed both Kaizen and Kaikaku as tools within the famous Toyota Production System (TPS).

Kaizen Events are powerful tools for making rapid changes in an organization, but in some cases are used in isolation rather than part of an overall process improvement strategy. In this article we look at the advantages and disadvantages of conducting Kaizen Events.

### The Kaizen Event

The Kaizen Event or Blitz is a focused, intense, short-term project to improve a process. Substantial resources are required to make this a success. A Kaizen Event usually includes training followed by analysis, design, and re-arrangement of a product line or area. A consultant (“sensei”) or facilitator is often used to orchestrate the Event, which normally takes 2 to 10 days to complete. The results are immediate, dramatic, and satisfying.



### Advantages of the Kaizen Event

Following von Clausewitz’s principle of “concentration”, the Kaizen Event or Blitz focuses all resources towards a narrow and specific objective. The intensity and urgency overcomes the intellectual resistance to a new paradigm. People have little time to think of reasons for delay. It forces solutions.

The execution is dramatic. The results are significant, clear, and quick. This generates enthusiasm and satisfaction. The Blitz is a great introductory tool for process improvement and its components of Rapid Set-up and work cells.



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### Disadvantages of the Kaizen Event

- The training, for an Event is necessarily superficial. There is insufficient time for deep learning of principles, trade-offs, and design methodology.
- Running an Event does little to develop a culture and systems for sustainable continuous improvement across an organization. In fact the overall organization's processes may suffer. These events focus on localized areas, and As Goldratt said, "A system of local optimum's is not an optimum system." It can result in islands of productivity within a organization that, otherwise, is a mess.
- A Kaizen Blitz is not a substitute for an Operational Strategy. It is an implementation methodology, which when used correctly can help organization create a bias for action.
- If scoped and managed incorrectly, it will create high expectation for improvement that are non sustainable, or not completely thought through.



### Conclusion

Kaizen Events are a powerful tool to get an organization or department kick started in process improvement, but they do not provide a holistic, lasting solution to achieving sustainable continuous improvement. They should be used:

- At the beginning of Process Improvement Implementation to shift paradigms and quickly demonstrate results.
- To plant LEAN "seeds" within an organization and, to raise awareness of the process improvement initiatives.
- When part of a well-thought-out operational or business strategy that is linked to specific business objectives.
- In conjunction with an integrated system to ensure follow through and benefit capture



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