

Chapter 24

Kaizen Problem Solving and How is it Different from that of Six Sigma?

In our journey towards understanding the 3Ps of Kaizen, we had seen the Philosophy of Kaizen – as a continuous improvement cycle driven by intrinsic motivation, resulting in higher profitability of the organisation – and the Principles of Kaizen – Value to the customer, focus, leveraging the leverage points, challenge people and inclination towards action. We also discussed the Rapid improvement approach. I understand from the responses and communications, that people – from both manufacturing and services domains – who had not witnessed the Rapid Improvement or the transformation – are not convinced about its feasibility. But, yes, it will be unconvincing until we see it once.

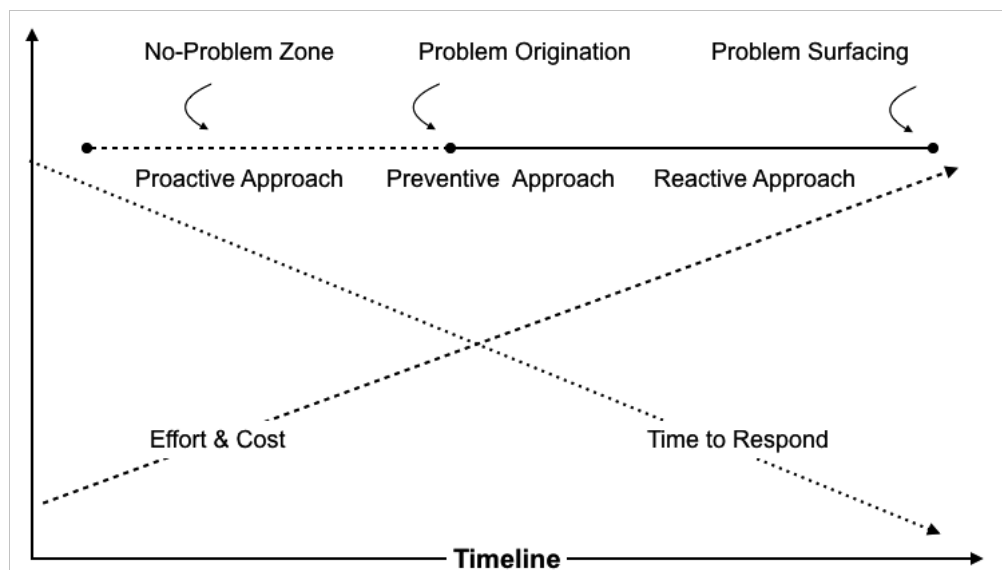


Image 68: Kaizen Problem Solving Approach

As the next aspect of Kaizen Practices, we will see the Kaizen Problem Solving – the reasons for its high impact results, and how this approach is different from that of Six Sigma Problem Solving.

What is Kaizen Problem Solving?

How do we normally deal with our day to day problems in our workplace – say there is a customer complaint, an internal rejection, quality problem, delay or any other service failure?

Traditionally, managers either try to ‘manage’ the situation or ‘warn his people’. If the problem persists, then he will take a threatening or a punishing measure. Sometimes, he will quickly calculate the loss and ask his people “Now, who is going to bear this loss? If this happens again, I need to deduct it from your salary”.

When the problem recurs, his people will try to cover up and hide it under the grey area. Now that they learned to ‘manage’ the problem by themselves. It either escapes the department and gets caught somewhere the downstream at a later point or gets through the process and reaches the customer. Then it comes back haunting the company and the manager in the form of customer returns, warranty losses or poor customer satisfaction scores – leading to catastrophic damages to the company’s reputation.

Kaizen Way

With the Kaizen Philosophy in place, the organisation encourages people to open up and expose problems, so that they can act on them at their own pace towards solving them instead of ‘managing’ them. This proactive approach to solving potential problems helps to challenge people and improve their problem-solving skills.

The challenged mind works continuously towards attainment of the goal, whereas the threatened mind tries to escape the situation or to smartly manage it.

Kaizen Problem Solving – 8 Steps

1. Identify the Theme

Organisations with a bigger picture in mind will always have a theme for improvement. They know the movement of markets and changing customer preferences.

“The biggest problem for an organisation is not that they need to improve a lot; but that they do not have anything to improve.”

It is the responsibility of the leader to prioritise those themes and to assign the project to the teams.

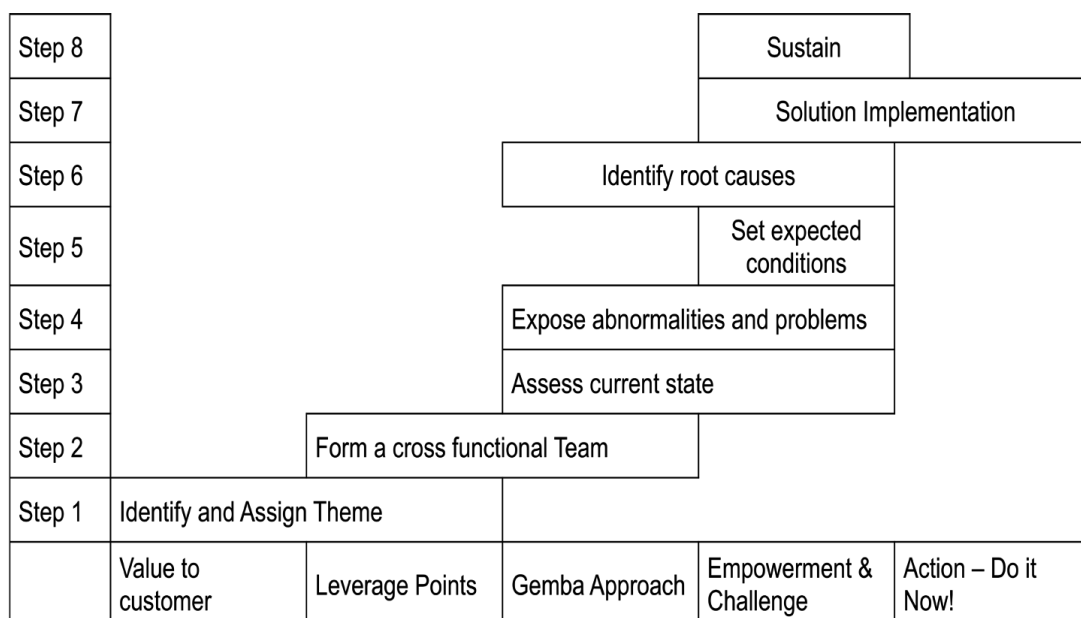


Image 69: The steps in Kaizen Problem Solving

If you have a recognisable problem in your work area, that can also be considered for the problem-solving.

2. Forming a Team

People closely related to the problem area are chosen as a team. It is a small group of 3 or 4 people including the operators, his supervisor, an engineer from maintenance. For this reason, this is named as Small Group Activity (SGA). This is also called as Quality Circles, as they predominantly focus on Quality Improvement projects.

Everyone knows something about the problem – Everyone knows something unique about it. By forming a right team, the team knows many things about the problem!

3 & 4. Assess Current Condition & Expose Abnormalities

Conduct an analysis of available data using simple QC Tools or conduct a value stream study or a detailed Muda/Mura/Muri observation to arrive at the current state.

Meet, discuss, decide and act in the Gemba!