

Kaizen: Concepts and Misinterpretations

Jun NAKAMURO

Executive Director, Enna, Bellingham WA, 98229, USA
jnakamuro@gmail.com

Abstract

The Japanese word “Kaizen” has become a blanket term for a variety of improvement initiatives. It is sometimes used synonymously with “Lean”, which is itself often used synonymously with “Six-Sigma”, “5S”, and “TPS”. Kaizen stands out from this pack of process improvement labels because, more than any other, Kaizen has deep cultural connotations. This article seeks remedy the misinterpretations of Kaizen that have become common outside of Japan. It’s objective is to enhance the cultural approach to process improvement within all industries by accurately defining Kaizen and its supporting elements in their original context within Japanese culture.

Keywords: Kaizen, Lean, Hansei, Japanese, Leadership, culture, translation