

Want an Effective Kaizen Event? Don't Forget the Human Side!



Kaizen events often represent the initial rapid deployment vehicle for lean transformations. Effective events drive step-function improvement, momentum and organizational learning and engagement. But while many people gravitate to the technical side of kaizen events (hey, check out this cool kanban system!), it's as much, if not more, about embedding lean principles and capabilities within the culture.

Only then can improvements become sustainable. Only then can the organization move from purely event driven kaizen to the much more powerful combination of (occasional) events and true daily kaizen - the frequent, small, process focused improvements conducted by engaged and enabled employees in their everyday work. This is what separates the lean pretenders from the lean practitioners.

The 2 Cores

One core principle of lean is respect for the individual. While employees do not represent the entirety of lean impacted humanity, they are the primary learners, doers, beneficiaries and sometimes, when kaizen events are improperly applied, "victims." They are also enablers, adopters and/or saboteurs of change. Resistance is rooted in the human side at least as much as the technical.

Too bad most lean leaders - executives, steering committee members, [kaizen promotion officers](#), value stream managers, kaizen event team leaders, etc., myopically focus on the technical and forget basic change management best practices that relate to employee engagement.

They also often forget another core principle of lean - humility.

Case Study: An Aerospace Success

An aerospace and defense manufacturer had suffered declining sales and backlog, for a variety of reasons.

While previously it had never been an example of best practices relative to robust processes and operational effectiveness, it had enjoyed success largely due to its technical depth, and the know-how resident in its long-term employees. The company also played in a market space with a high barrier to entry. Then several rounds of downsizing removed many of the "greybeards," and operational performance plummeted. Morale quickly followed, and made the trajectory even steeper. Trust, never strong within the firm and especially between the union and management, was fragile at best and contentious at worst.



Figure 1

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Turnaround efforts failed, and several management teams came and went over the next several years. New leadership sought to implement lean.

Unsurprisingly, the initiative was met with extreme cynicism.

While management drove technical and physical changes like deploying co-located, cross-functional teams, layout modifications, lean managements systems, kaizen events, etc., the soft-side deficiencies were clearly limiting progress. They were a barrier to engagement, and to the development of a lean culture.

The leader humbly recognized that he did not have the capability on his own to quickly rebuild the trust needed, in order to get the requisite changes implemented. He sought out a consulting expert in teambuilding and organizational development.

Leadership, with the guidance of the consultant, identified the cultural barriers through a series of small sessions that involved virtually everyone in the organization. From that, sub-teams crafted a vision statement, articulating an envisioned future from a performance perspective, as well as the perspectives of competency and culture. Equally critical was the development of a set of agreements by which management and workers agreed to abide.

The agreements addressed the very barriers that were identified in the initial sessions and also

incorporated some "give and take" between leadership and the associates. The agreements included statements like "we will work in accordance with standard work," and "we will not disrespect others," along with simple, common-sense steps which everyone in the organization would follow, in order to address broken agreements.

The vision and agreement development process, bolstered by a series of team training sessions, culminated in an event in which everyone in the organization signed the vision/agreement document. The event was steeped in emotion and was powerfully symbolic.

The organization, now striving to achieve the vision and living the agreements, had a new level of credibility and alignment. This, along with a greater level of emotional intelligence, established a foundation of trust and risk-taking, from which emanated a broad level of engagement in the lean implementation efforts.

This was a springboard for results that included a 41% point increase in delivery to schedule and an 83% reduction in past due jobs within the next 9 months.

It was also a springboard for profound personal and organizational growth.

Eleven questions that lean leaders need to answer

The most concrete, technical aspects of the kaizen event must be balanced with the human. The balance must begin prior to the first of the multi-phase event approach, and well beyond it, per

Pre-event planning.

2) How can lean leaders best select kaizen event team members for event, employee development and change management impact?

3) How should lean leaders communicate to event-affected employees the what, why, how and when of the planned event?

4) How can lean leaders best train event team leaders and participants so that they are ready for the challenge of the event (discomfort is expected, anxiety not so much)?

5) How can lean leaders identify existing feelings in key stakeholders?

6) What feelings are likely to generate forces to push forward and what feelings are likely to hold back positive change?

7) How do lean leaders eliminate/manage negative feelings and create the ideal feelings supportive of changes they wish to make?

Kaizen Event Participant Responsibilities

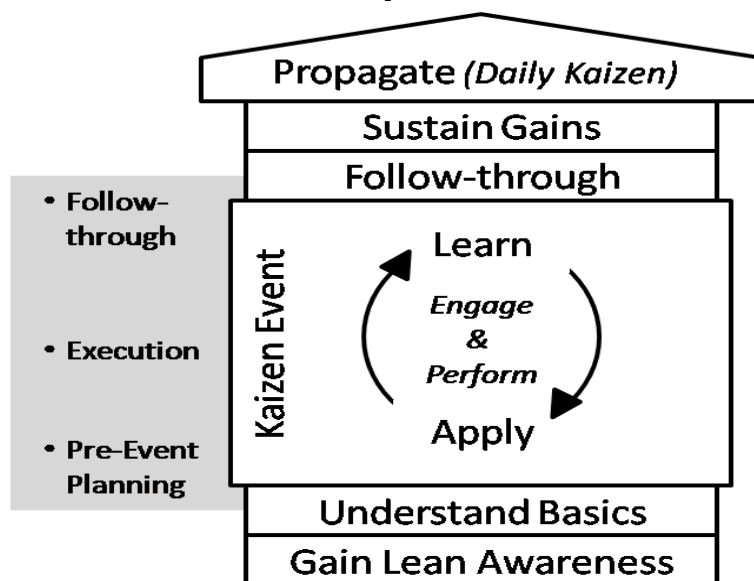


Figure 2

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Figure 1.

Basic multi-phase human considerations can be captured within 11 thought-provoking questions, which fall within 4 overall categories:

Strategy.

1) Why, how, where and when should lean leaders employ kaizen events to drive value stream improvements and satisfy strategic imperatives, while also positively exposing and engaging stakeholders within the process?

Event execution.

8) How will lean leaders conduct the kaizen event in order to best satisfy and then sustain the event targets while also engaging, challenging, stretching, supporting and developing team members and the organization?

Event follow-through

9) How can lean leaders best recognize the event participants for their effort and accomplishments?

10) How can lean leaders ensure process

adherence to the new standard work, and process performance, as well as completion of any "newspaper" items and therefore sustain the kaizen team's hard earned gains?

11) How can lean leaders continuously improve the kaizen event process, its effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction...so that they will want to participate in future kaizen events?

Obviously, effective lean leaders have much to anticipate and execute. Similarly, there is a lot expected of kaizen event participants - see Figure 2. The satisfaction of these participant responsibilities is largely driven by, you guessed it, lean leaders. Lean leaders must, among other things, effectively answer the 11 questions raised above, while also holding their people accountable.

Tip From the Pros: When the Kaizen Circus Leaves Town

Often leaders and associates within the kaizen event target area feel that their job is done immediately after the final report-out. It's as if the kaizen circus has pulled tent stakes and its "back to normal." Nothing can be further from the truth.

Without a rigorous post-event follow-through it is highly unlikely that there will be any process adherence or process performance. If the event gains are not sustained, it means the event was itself nothing but waste.

So what is a lean leader to do?

There are a number of things, but most importantly is the timely completion of the kaizen newspaper items (leftover to do's) and the regular application of [leader standard work](#) to ensure that everyone is following the new standard work and that abnormal conditions are quickly identified and addressed. Simple recognition for the new

behaviors is also critical for continuing the positive momentum and engagement that initially comes from the kaizen event.

The Transformation Leadership Model

The context for much of this is the transformation leadership model, reflected here in Figure 3. The transformation leadership model reflects a foundation of humility and respect for the individual. It is from this foundation that a rather traditional means of lean cultural change emanates - technical adoption preceding (rather than fecklessly waiting for) cultural change as the organization acts its way into a new way of being.

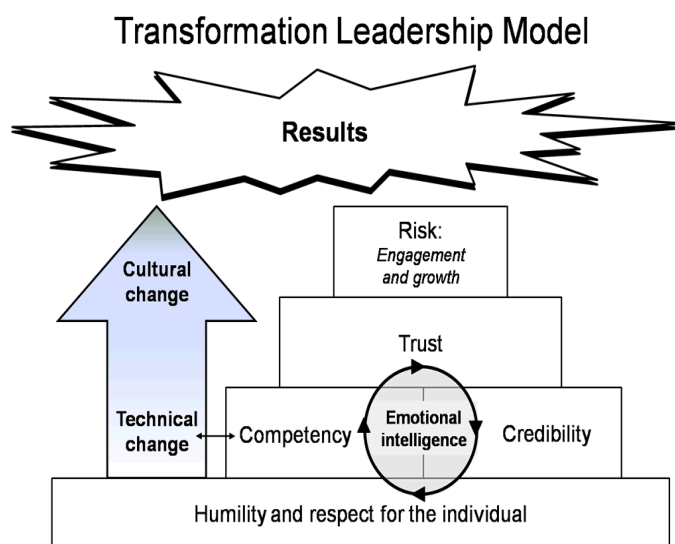


Figure 3

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Lean leaders can also better address the human considerations by thoughtfully adhering to basic kaizen event standard work, as assisted by various references, tools, and forums, including:

- Pre-event planning checklists
- Kaizen event area profiles
- Pre-event training
- Kaizen event kick-off meetings
- Daily team leader meetings

- Kaizen newspapers
- Team behavioral audit forms
- Post-event follow-through checklists
- Kaizen event evaluation forms
- [Leader standard work](#)

However, this work does not happen in a vacuum. It is facilitated by lean leaders who are both competent and credible. Their competency must extend to things like strategy deployment, lean management systems, change management, kaizen event standard work and development and deployment of a kaizen promotion office. Their credibility must reflect a certain pragmatism and a demonstrated habit of excellent follow-through. In the midst of all of these elements, an effective lean leader employs something called emotional intelligence (EI) - an awareness and proactive response system to emotions within the organization. The model creates a dynamic of trust and appropriate individual and organizational risk-taking. This risk-taking is both enabled and powered by engagement and personal and organizational growth.

Case Studies: What about that second shift?

Respect for the individual means that event affected employees (they can't all be on the kaizen team) must be treated as the important stakeholders that they are. In fact, the more that they will be impacted, the more personal, detailed and frequent the communication should be relative to the event scope, targets, big picture, process, progress and impact on them.

It's amazing how often leadership overlooks the basic need for effective communication. In fact this need transcends pre-event planning and includes the execution and follow-through phases as well.



A real example, and there are too many, includes an event that was focused on what was initially a multi-person assembly line. The kaizen team did their work on the first shift over several days. They developed a cell and related standard work that, after much of the waste was eliminated, needed only one employee per shift to meet customer demand. Layout, staffing, work sequence, standard work-in-process and cycle time changed quickly and dramatically. It was great stuff, but they forgot about the 2nd shift!

Heck, the 2nd shift had little clue what was going on until stuff started moving. Then they got ticked, rearranging the equipment from its new configuration back to something that approximated the old layout. It took a long time for leadership to recover from that misstep, and certainly delayed trust and engagement.

Emotions... really?

Much of the transformation leadership model is pretty straight forward. However, certainly in the context of kaizen events, what is relevant but really never talked about are emotions! Yet, this is important stuff. The military, specifically Major General (Ret.) Maggart, recognized this reality, "Leadership is an emotional business that grips the heart, soul, and imagination of those being led."

That grip may be a little less tight in the corporate world, but it is critical nonetheless. Gallup has identified employees as belonging to one of 3 categories. They are engaged, not engaged, or actively disengaged. Kaizen events themselves often generate heightened engagement and feelings of engagement among those that participate. [From Gallup research](#), we know that employees feel engaged when they feel they matter, that they belong to something larger than

themselves and that their recognized strengths contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organization and the customer experience.

However, if employees experience a culture where they often feel devalued and disrespected and are feeling actively disengaged or not engaged, their participation in kaizen or other change related initiatives will obviously be impacted in a negative way. Are there then some pre-kaizen event steps that will create a sense of opportunity and feelings of hopefulness, optimism and engagement? The need to impact feelings to secure meaningful change is specifically addressed in the publication "*A Sense of Urgency*," by leading change theorist, John Kotter. In our own work we have written about the Emotion Roadmap™, a tool for helping individuals and organizations create the feelings that are ideal for managing change in our chapter on Transformation Leadership (Hamel and Wolfe, 2009).

Emotion Roadmap™: Emotion-Based Planning and Problem Solving Process

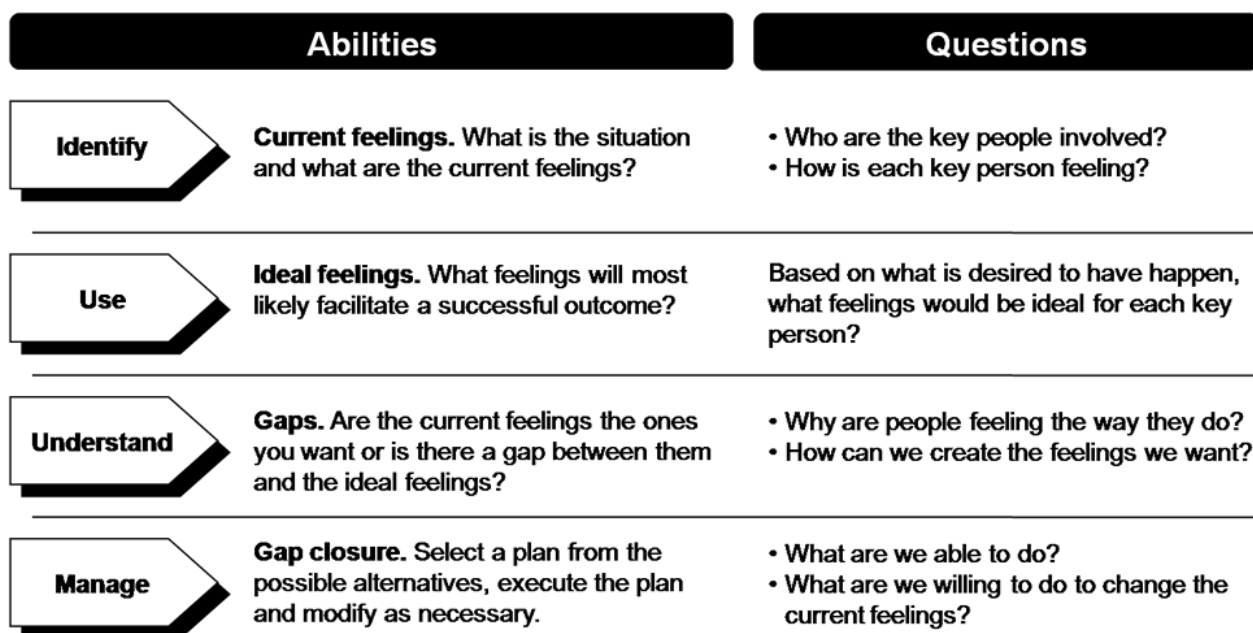


Figure 4

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And so while we recognize that each organization has an element of uniqueness, we also recognize that all organizations want people to feel engaged. This is particularly the case when lean leaders are introducing major change in an organization.

The Emotion Roadmap serves as a template for driving competitive advantage for an organization by actually providing a process for identifying the existing feelings of key stakeholders involved with the change, then determining what feelings will facilitate the change (we start by assuming we wish all employees to feel engaged) and then, if we see a gap between what feelings exist and what is desired, we determine what strategies can be used to create the feelings that will facilitate the successful implementation of the change.

One way we know how to increase feelings of engagement has to do with encouraging supervisors to look for ways to focus on and leverage employee strengths. Kaizen is a great opportunity to do exactly that.

The emotion roadmap also can be used to determine how to lower negative emotions that are likely to cause resistance to change. Again, while individuals and organizations all are somewhat unique it is important to recognize that one fear that impedes acceptance of change is the fear of loss of control. Kaizen event induced change will inevitably impact work, work content and span of roles and responsibilities as least waste ways within the context of value stream and value delivery optimization are pursued.

Wolfe has created an innovative process that inspires performance and enables and encourages supervisors to provide meaningful feedback that helps employees and executives feel in control by providing clarity on roles and responsibilities as they relate to any changes in current and future goals and objectives. This approach includes the development and organization-wide (team, business unit, etc.) adoption of vision and mission

statements and related (management by) agreements to facilitate trust and engagement among the stakeholders.

Tip From the Pros: Fear Not



Fear not. One emotion that is often encountered within kaizen events, especially at the beginning of a lean transformation, is fear - specifically fear of the anticipated changes and the potential implications to the stakeholders (job loss, shifting roles, loss of power, etc.). This fear typically drives resistance - not a good thing when trying to drive sustainable continuous improvement.

Rather than fear, lean leaders must try to create an environment where people are hopeful, enthusiastic, secure, courageous, etc. Unfortunately, leaders often fail to sufficiently address emotions. They let the stakeholders "stew" in uncertainty and resistance.

For example, leaders of some companies, contrary to best practices, purposely say nothing relative to employment stability. The best practice is to adopt a policy which states something like, "no one will lose their employment as a result of productivity improvements." When executives hedge their bets (hey, maybe we can take some "heads" out) and do not explicitly articulate such a policy, there is a

lack of trust and there is fear. This undercurrent will kill any kaizen event's effectiveness and ultimately the lean transformation effort.

Effective lean leaders formally announce the employment security policy, but also let people know that roles will often change, workers will be redeployed, etc. This is all against a backdrop of good change management (proof of the need, effective communication, recognition of wins, etc.), an environment of accountability and a track record that confirms credibility (yes, workers were redeployed, but were set up to win in their new roles).

Good leaders empower their people to effect change and to experiment (and with that fail and learn). These themes must be reaffirmed explicitly and implicitly, in word and deed, before, during and after each kaizen event.

Ultimately, more than an event

In the end, lean leaders must facilitate more than system-driven kaizen: execution of kaizen events that are largely identified and specified by value stream improvement plans. They must evolve the organization into one which regularly applies principle-driven kaizen: the combination of system-driven kaizen plus daily kaizen.

This transformation requires an awareness and competency such that the eleven questions can be

satisfied not only by an elite portion of the lean leadership, but by virtually all lean leadership. Real transformation can only be achieved through a profound application of the transformation leadership model. Which includes, as a start, the understanding and application of kaizen event standard work and respect for the individual.



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