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CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENT OF PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM USING THE KAIZEN PHILOSOPHY: THE CASE OF AMBO UNIVERSITY

Abstract. Since 2009, kaizen has been implemented in many public sector organisations in Ethiopia. Hence, the researchers are motivated to investigate the achievements and challenges of kaizen design and implementation in public sector in Ethiopia on example of Ambo University. The overall objective of this study was to examine the challenges and achievement of Public Sector reform using the kaizen philosophy based on the Ambo University. Sixty respondents (30% of 200) from each department were selected for the study. A descriptive research design was used in the study. A questionnaire and interview were used to collect primary data from employees, followed by collecting secondary data from various sources. In summary, the findings of the study concluded that the main achievements achieved through kaizen are cost minimisation, waste minimisation and a good working environment. The conclusions point to the fact that one might spot many significant problems concerning the implementation of kaizen in Ambo University such as lack of loyalty in implementation; the approach to the implementation is top-down rather than bottom-up, lack of contextualisation of the tool during implementation. Based on the findings, various recommendations suggested the improvement of kaizen practices at Ambo University.

Keywords: kaizen philosophy, Ambo University, public sector reform, challenges and achievements

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Changing the public sector is one of the most difficult processes. Commercial sector companies receive immediate signals from the market and are forced to change in case short-term or even daily performance deteriorates. For the institutions, on the other hand, undertaking a process of change might be challenging even when after receiving strong feedback concerning dissatisfaction both from people and business sector as well as when

there are clear signs that the services they provide are no longer consistent with an increasingly dynamic society (Pol and Ville, 2009).

Kaizen is one of many various reforms that have been implemented in Ethiopia. Faced with emerging global competition and significant changes in consumer needs, wants and tastes, many companies today are using the Japanese management system known as kaizen to redesign their production processes to meet the aforementioned needs. A dynamic kaizen strategy relies on constantly rotating Plan, Do, Check and Act (PDCA) cycles that

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focus on customer-centric processes and aim to improve productivity, products and service quality by achieving small improvements over time (Desta et al., 2014).

According to Kikuchi (2014) “Kaizen is referred to as a participatory or bottom-up approach, because employees take the initiative for improvement activities. I think that Mr. Meles found this kind of approach more fitting to the national character of Ethiopia and therefore felt it would be more effective than top-down approaches commonly used in Western countries. Kaizen initiatives are often carried out in small groups, and Ethiopia has a deep-rooted culture of collaboration in small groups that has been fostered through agricultural work”.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Under NPM, when using the services of the public sectors, citizens of a country are treated as a Customer or Service Recipient. The public sector manifesting the ideas of business should meet the needs of its customer in an efficient and effective way. The central principle of the kaizen philosophy is to cause continuous improvement in work, which means that kaizen is necessary, when implemented in an organisation, to bring about sustainable change by minimising costs. When kaizen is implemented correctly, it will facilitate eliminating waste, reducing inventory, improving customer satisfaction and increasing profitability (Kitaw, 2011).

It uses a steady approach via obtainable technology, training work teams, humanising the workplace, and liberating the thinking of top management and employees at all levels.

Therefore, the implementation of kaizen is key concerning public service delivery because it can help the organisations to performing their operations for the benefit of the general public. As many studies show, implementing kaizen can improve service delivery without increasing waste, increase profitability by reducing administrative costs, increase people’s (under old public management) / customer satisfaction (under NPM). Ethiopia is implementing various public sector reforms, but most of the reform tools are withheld or failing. Some of them include PBR, Balanced Scorecard, kaizen, Citizen Charter and more. The above issue is so interesting that many researchers decided to conduct a study in this field, hence, this study focuses on public sector reform using kaizen tool in Ambo University.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General objective

The general objective of this study was to examine the challenges and achievement of public sector reform connected with the implementation of kaizen philosophy in Ambo University.

Specific objectives

Explicitly, the study examined the following objectives:

- Practices of kaizen in Ambo university,
- Challenges of implementing the kaizen.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study adopts qualitative and quantitative descriptive research approach using survey questionnaire and interview as the primary data collection methods. The type, approach and data collection methods adopted in this study are determined by the very nature of the research topic and the questions the researcher seeks to explore and describe – the implementation, achievements and limitations of public sector reform, especially the kaizen philosophy in Ambo University.

Data type and data collection tools

The study used primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through a questionnaire and interview, while secondary data was collected from a review of organizational performance, books, journals, articles and the Internet sources.

Sampling method

The university currently uses kaizen as a tool in the Property Department Office, the Student Affairs Office and the General Services Office, so the total number of permanent staff working in these offices is 200. The rule of thumb mentioned by Blanche et al. (2006), was used for 30% of the sample size for small populations up to 1000. Therefore, a rule of thumb was used to select respondents from each office, whereby 60 respondents (30% of 200) were selected. The researcher, on purpose, selected respondents working in the university administration department for the interview four people each from Property Department Office, Student Affairs Office and General Services Office.

Data analysis methods

The researcher has applied qualitative & quantitative data analysis methods depending on the nature of the data collected. The responses consist of simple descriptive analyses such as mean, standard deviation, percentage and frequency, which are presented in tables and analysed.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Conceptual overview and definitions of kaizen

According to Mullins (2010), kaizen is a Japanese word that has become common in many Western companies. Kaizen culture is an organisational culture based on the three main principles namely, process and results, systems thinking, nonjudgmental and non-blaming. The word indicates a process of continuous improvement of the standard way of work. It is a compound word involving two concepts: Kai (mean change) and Zen (mean for the better). The term also comes from “Gemba Kaizen” meaning ‘continuous improvement’ (CI). Continuous Improvement is one of the core strategies for excellence in production, and is considered vital in today’s competitive environment. As (Robinson, 1991) states, it requires endless effort for improvement involving everyone in the organisation.

The objectives of kaizen

The benefits of kaizen include increasing number of private enterprises and implementing quality and productivity improvements. The success of the kaizen implementation has also contributed to the spread of kaizen to private enterprise in sustainable manner (EKI, 2013).

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Ethiopian experience of kaizen

Supriyanto and Benty (2019) – based on the research, it was concluded that kaizen focuses on continuous quality improvement (continuous improvement), directed towards improving the culture of quality educational institutions. This process leads to improved productivity and quality of education. In its implementation, the direction and the attempt to create a culture of educational institutions must be prioritised. The kaizen concept assumes zero defects.

The Ethiopian government implemented a system of organizational effectiveness and efficiency before

implementing kaizen. According to Debela (2009), in 1994 the Ethiopian government initiated a reform of the civil service organisation with the aim of improving the service delivery system in the public sector. It was implemented in the government offices and it was supposed to bring radical changes concerning the activities of state institutions, but in reality it halted for many months and is now widely regarded as a failure. The Ethiopian government started promoting the idea of kaizen, a Japanese management philosophy, among private and state owned companies; the idea was first brought to the attention of Ethiopia’s late PM Meles Zenawi in 2008 (Negussie and Emnet, 2009).

Consequently, the Ethiopian government, inspired by the practicality of the kaizen policy and strategy, adopted a model approach. In 2008, the Ethiopian government approached the Japanese government for assistance in implementing the Japanese management method known as kaizen. Before implementing and fully institutionalising the kaizen philosophy on a large scale, the then Ethiopian Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOIT) reviewed, in 2009, 63 companies that were located within a 100 km radius of Addis Ababa to determine their quality and productivity status between October 2009 and June 2011. After the initial screening of the 63 firms, only 30 firms (i.e. 10 from the metal industry, 6 from the agro-processing industry, 6 from the chemical industry, 4 from the leather industry and 4 from the textile industry) were selected as pilot projects. Out of the above companies, ten, five and three pilot companies were given good, best and excellent status respectively by the EKI (Desta, 2012).

The criteria for selecting these companies were: (a) they were located near Addis Ababa city (i.e. they were within a radius of 100 km), (b) they were involved in exporting and/or importing, (c) they had reached an established capital level and (d) they employed trained personnel. After observing the success of the above implementation in 2011, the Ethiopian Kaizen Institute, which became a consulting entity providing ideas, support and assistance in developing and improving the quality and productivity framework for the whole country, was established (Ethiopian Ministry of Industry, Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2011). The institute found that the result of the work in the companies was value added by the companies and employees, and the profit margin of the pilot companies willing to implement kaizen increased by 176%, 105% and 210%

respectively, mainly due to the increase in labour productivity. According to Desta (2013), the impact of material, machinery and energy inputs was insignificant. This may indicate that after implementing kaizen, competence is the key point of productivity.

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION & INTERPRETATION

Profile of the respondents

As indicated in Table 1, the majority (60%) of the respondents were between 31–40 years of age, taking this

into account, one might assume that most of the respondents are of a working age and can think critically and analyse the situation. In terms of gender distribution, 66.7% of the respondents were male, indicating an uneven (disproportionate) gender distribution within the university across different positions.

Concerning education, 44 (73.3%) of the respondents graduated first cycle degree programme or higher. They were assumed to have sufficient knowledge, skills and competence in critical thinking and systematic situation analysis. Of the total respondents, 80% had worked in the university at various positions for at least more

Table 1. Profile of the respondents (age, gender level of education, employee's job experience)

	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18–30 year	12	20
	31–40 year	36	60
	41–50 year	8	13.3
	51 and above	4	6.7
	total	60	100
Gender of the respondents	male	40	66.7
	female	20	33.3
	total	60	100
Level of education	diploma	16	26.7
	BA/BSc	35	58.3
	MA/MSc	9	15
	Ph.D.	4	1.7
	total	60	100
Job experience	1–3 year	12	20
	4–7 year	35	58.3
	8–11 year	9	15
	12 year and above	4	6.7
	total	60	100
Employees working place	general service	20	33.3
	students service	20	33.3
	property administration	16	26.7
	other	4	6.7
	total	60	100

Source: own survey, 2019.

than four years and were expected to participate in creating and implementing the kaizen from 2001–present.

Generally, the characteristics of the respondents indicate that their gender is almost proportional, they are of working age, well educated, experienced and work in the direct implementation and managerial positions. They are expected to have in-depth knowledge and firsthand information about the practice and achievements of kaizen.

Employees awareness on kaizen

Regarding employees feedback on taking of training on kaizen majority of employees (90%) were trained on kaizen.

This means that the awareness-building activities have been done properly which provides a good basis

Table 2. Training about kaizen

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Have you ever attended a training on kaizen?		
yes	54	90
no	6	10
total	60	100

Source: own survey, 2019.

for employees to apply kaizen in their daily work. The results indicate that not all staff take part in kaizen training and the full training is required to successfully implement the philosophy at the university.

Concerning employee’s level of awareness & knowledge, as shown in Table 3 below, the standards deviation is 0.706, which means that there is less variation on the level of awareness of the respondents. Therefore, one can assume that the university has been doing well on building employees awareness and know-how concerning kaizen via training provided for employees from different positions.

As indicated in Table 3, the mean value of the respondents using kaizen as a quality improvement tool is 1.72 which means that they are using kaizen as a quality improvement tool. As indicated in Table 3, the mean value of indication of respondents concerning the support received from the university in implementing kaizen is 1.72, which is above the mean maximum value (3), from which it can be concluded that the support from the university management in implementing kaizen is at a high level.

As indicated in Table 4, the majority of the respondents (80%) answered that in order to increase staff awareness, the university organises and provides various training activities.

Table 3. Level of awareness, kaizen as a tool for quality improvement and support on kaizen

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Sta. Deviation
Do I have a good level of awareness & knowledge on kaizen?	60	1	4	2.10	0.706
The office is currently employing kaizen as a tool for quality improvement	60	1	3	1.72	0.555
The university management is providing various means of support on the implementation of the kaizen?	60	1	3	1.72	0.555

Source: own survey (2019).

Table 4. Types of support on training

Item	Frequency	Percentage
For Ques. No. 4 if your answer is SA and A, please elaborate		
providing training	48	80
coaching	9	15
creating a supportive environment	3	5
total	60	100

Source: own survey, 2019.

Table 5. Organization previous performance and kaizen

Items		Frequency	Percentage
How do you compare/rate last year performance (after implementing kaizen)?	very good	12	20
	good	36	60
	satisfactory	12	20
	total	60	100

Source: own survey (2019).

Table 6. Achievements got by kaizen

Items		Frequency	Percentage
What are the main achievements got by the university after the implementation?	waste minimization	38	63.3
	improve customer satisfaction	6	10
	enhance profitability	4	6.7
	cut inventories	12	20
	total	60	100

Source: own survey (2019).

Employee’s response on kaizen vis-à-vis service delivery

Here, regarding rating or compare last year performance by using kaizen as indicated in the Table 5 of below majority of them (80%) responded that using of kaizen is improving the performance of their bureaus.

Furthermore, Table 6 shows that the main benefits the university has gained from kaizen are minimising waste, improving service quality, increasing profitability and reducing inventory.

The data in Table 7 shows that 38 (63.3%) respondents answered that the main factor that promotes the university’s use of kaizen is the experience gained in various public sectors that implemented kaizen.

The survey results presented in Table 8 show that implementing kaizen improves service delivery performance.

Table 9 indicates that the majority of people working in an office use kaizen for the purpose of the administrative support.

Table 7. Motivation to use kaizen

Item		Frequency	Percentage
What motivated you to use the tool?	different public sectors’ experience	38	63.3
	need to use resource efficiently	10	16.7
	to create conducive working environment	12	20
	total	60	100

Source: own survey, 2019.

Table 8. Results of the implementation of kaizen concerning the performance of the office

Item	N	Mini	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Results of the implementation of kaizen concerning the performance of the office	60	1	3	1.95	0.502

Source: own survey, 2019.

Table 9. Purpose of using kaizen

Item	Frequency	Percent
For which purpose you are using kaizen in your office		
administrative support	44	73.3
team work	5	8.3
cost minimisation	10	16.7
all the above	1	1.7
total	60	100

Source: own survey, 2019.

Challenges associated with the implementation of kaizen

As indicated in question 1 part 4, the main challenges faced by employees when implementing kaizen are lack of commitment on the part of employees, mainly operatives, narrow view of the tool only for administrative support (this leads to the limited implementation of the tool only in some departments), even if most employees have good awareness and knowledge of kaizen, they lack commitment in implementation, their approach to the implementation is top-down rather than bottom-up, there is lack of contextualisation of the tool during implementation, no support from EKI. These are the main challenges that the university faces when implementing kaizen. Most of the problems come from the internal environment of the university, which means that they can be resolved. However, a poor response to the challenges makes the implementation less effective, hence the achievements are not as great as expected.

Next, when asked (Queue 2 part 4) about the mechanisms currently in place to address the main problems, respondents answered that according to them, there are trainings that can increase staff awareness regarding kaizen. The university is working to make staff committed to implementing the tool (which is a top-down approach) by designing various aids to facilitate

the implementation of the tool, and additionally, the university is cooperating with the Ethiopian Kaizen Institute.

Interview responses

1. Kaizen has been implemented at the university since 2011 which means that it is only at an early stage.
2. A major factor promoting the implementation of kaizen is the exchange of experience with other universities, entities from different sectors such as the sugar industry. Concerning kaizen, the university intends to create the best possible working environment by implementing the improvements mentioned in this work. The actions of the university are carried out in cooperation with the Ethiopian Kaizen Institute.
3. The goals that the implementation of kaizen achieves are to create a friendly working environment, minimise cost and time, develop teamwork, help create social relationships, motivate the involvement of every employee, from top management to every operative, which makes employees have a direct impact on the way services are delivered. Furthermore, if kaizen is fully implemented, it will enable the university to achieve its vision of being one of the top ten universities in Africa by providing quality education at a lower cost.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Kaizen originated in Japan and assumes that our way of life, whether at work, in our social life or at home, should focus on continuous improvement. Kaizen has been a major contributor to Japan's competitive success. Almost every government institution at all levels uses this tool. Management by Objectives (MBO), Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS), Balanced Scorecard (BSC), Civil Service Change Army (Yelewit Serawit), Citizen's Charter and now kaizen. In Ethiopia, among the industries identified as the best implementers and achievers of kaizen is the sugar industry, with Fincha'a and Wenji Sugar Factory among them. As for Universities, two - Ambo and Adegrat University - have decided to implement kaizen. Addis Ababa University started implementing kaizen in 2011. Of the total respondents, 83.3% were trained in kaizen. The main achievements resulting from the implementation of kaizen include minimising costs, minimising time, building team spirit among employees, creating a good working environment, intelligent office deployment (file & rank). The main challenges faced by employees when implementing kaizen are lack of commitment on the part of employees, mainly operatives, narrow view of the tool only for administrative support (this leads to the limited implementation of the tool only in some departments), even if most employees have good awareness and knowledge of kaizen, they lack commitment in implementation, their approach to the implementation is top-down rather than bottom-up, there is lack of contextualisation of the tool during implementation, no support from EKI.

A major factor promoting the implementation of kaizen is the exchange of experience with other universities, entities from different sectors such as the sugar industry. Concerning kaizen, the university intends to create the best possible working environment by implementing the improvements mentioned in this work. The actions of the university are carried out in cooperation with the Ethiopian Kaizen Institute.

Recommendation

Based on the result of the study gained from collected data the researchers make the following recommendations.

- Implementation of kaizen is beneficial as it requires continuous improvement which will provide sustainable benefits in the future.

- By applying kaizen it is possible to improve performance which is in line with the university's vision.
- Currently, the university collaborates with direct stakeholders such as EKI concerning coaching, training, guidance and support on kaizen. This collaboration should be continued as there are still positions that have not received training on kaizen (16.7% of respondents did not attend training).
- The research as well as the responses of the employees indicate that the implementation of kaizen has improved the office's performance and minimised costs. As a result, the university can succeed in achieving the previously set goal.
- The University should take steps to address the problems associated with implementing kaizen, which are: lack of commitment on the part of employees, mainly operatives, narrow view of the tool only for administrative support (this leads to the limited implementation of the tool only in some departments), even if most employees have good awareness and knowledge of kaizen, they lack commitment in implementation, their approach to the implementation is top-down rather than bottom-up, there is lack of contextualisation of the tool during implementation, no support from EKI.
- To improve the commitment of employees, the university should use mechanisms of encouragement by various forms of recognition for tasks well done, as well as formulating binding rules and applying continuous monitoring.
- Still, some employees view this tool narrowly, but the central philosophy of kaizen is to build team spirit, control costs, minimise work, focus on eliminating defects and, more fundamentally, improve employee skills by creating a collaborative atmosphere where everyone becomes fully aware of the key objectives. Each step of the kaizen process must and measured to provide economic value to its customers. Therefore, the university should work on developing employee awareness.
- Efforts should be made to increase employee commitment to implementing kaizen.
- Finally, if the university believes that implementing kaizen will help it meet its goals, it should strive to implement it effectively in all its departments.

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WYZWANIA I OSIĄGNIĘCIA REFORMY SEKTORA PUBLICZNEGO Z WYKORZYSTANIEM FILOZOFII KAIZEN: PRZYPADEK UNIWERSYTETU W AMBO

Abstrakt. Od 2009 roku filozofię Kaizen wdrażano w Etiopii w wielu organizacjach sektora publicznego. Zmotywowało to badaczy do zanalizowania efektów tej metody na przykładzie Uniwersytetu Ambo. Głównym celem opracowania było zatem zbadanie wyzwań i osiągnięć związanych z reformą sektora publicznego z wykorzystaniem filozofii Kaizen. Badania prowadzono na Uniwersytecie Ambo, jako respondentów przyjmując pracowników administracyjnych tej uczelni. Do udziału w badaniach zaproszono 60 osób (30% z 200). Zastosowano deskryptywny projekt badawczy. Oprócz zebranych danych pierwotnych (pochodzących z kwestionariuszy ankiet i wywiadów wśród pracowników) użyto także informacji wtórnych pochodzących z różnych źródeł. Na podstawie dokonanych ustaleń można wskazać, że głównymi osiągnięciami uzyskanymi poprzez Kaizen były minimalizacja kosztów oraz strat, a także utrzymanie tzw. dobrego środowiska pracy. W uwagach końcowych stwierdzono jednak, że istnieje dość znaczny problem we wdrażaniu Kaizen na Uniwersytecie Ambo, tj. brak lojalności w zakresie wdrażania. W praktyce metoda wdrażania okazała się bardziej podejściem odgórnym niż oddolnym, brakowało też kontekstualizacji narzędzia wdrażania. Dlatego na podstawie tych ustaleń opracowano różne sugerowane zalecenia i obszary wymagające poprawy praktyk Kaizen na Uniwersytecie Ambo.

Słowa kluczowe: filozofia kaizen, Uniwersytet Ambo, reforma sektora publicznego, wyzwania i osiągnięcia