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Industry Snapshot · Aerospace / Change Management

Using Kaizen to Lead Change: Post M&A in the Aerospace Sector

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INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

Using Kaizen to Lead Change During Post-Company Merger & Acquisition in the Aerospace Sector

This work-based learning industry snapshot aims to leverage best-practice leadership principles and change management processes to offer a recommended approach to implementing effective and sustained process change within an organisation in the aerospace industry, post-M&A.

To drive successful integration, managing people through change requires good leadership and a structured change management process with a clear vision and strategy. During the post-M&A period, employees may feel anxious — leaders must create the right environment to stimulate motivation and morale.

THE KEY LEADERSHIP LITERATURE

The aerospace sector is traditionally conservative to change, presenting challenges in a climate of business transformation. Two frameworks underpin this case study:

Kotter's 8-Step Change Model (1995) identified eight common errors in major process change: allowing complacency; failing to build a guiding coalition; underestimating vision; under-communicating; permitting obstacles; failing to create short-term wins; declaring victory too soon; and neglecting to anchor change in corporate culture.

Kaizen (Continuous Improvement) — a Japanese business philosophy used extensively in aerospace and automotive sectors. A Kaizen event (or 'Kaizen Blitz') is typically held over 4–5 days and delivers rapid, employee-empowered process transformation through cross-functional team activity. Combining Kotter's 8-step process with Kaizen provides a powerful post-M&A change management approach.

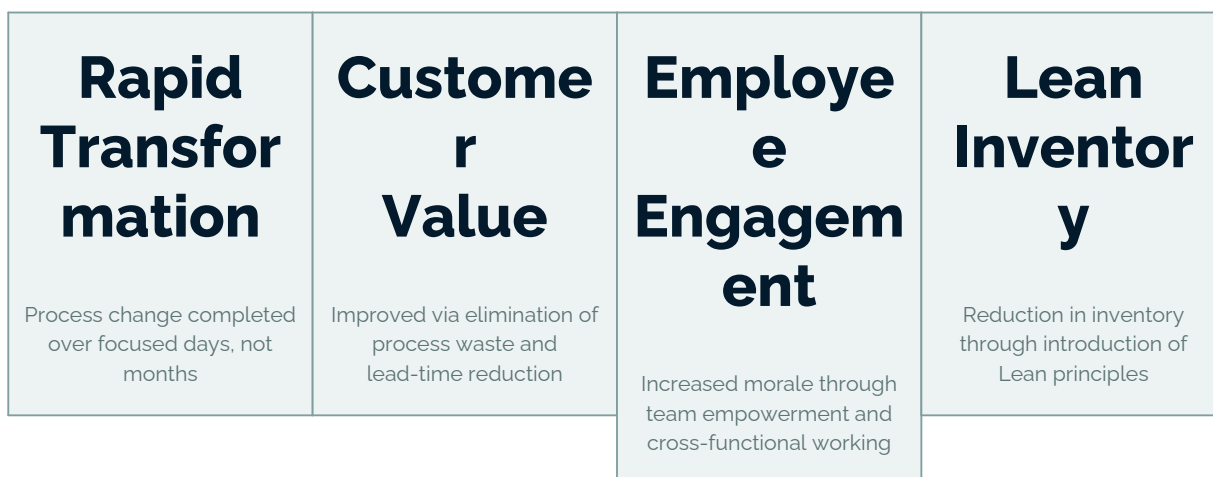
THE CASE STUDY

The company is a British FTSE 100 business specialising in the aerospace industry, subject to acquisition by a US company listed on the NYSE. The M&A completion took 18 months — during which time employee morale was at risk and motivation to engage with the change process was low.

The business exhibited a mixture of leadership styles. One division led with a consistent authoritative style fostering empowerment and accountability; others showed inconsistent styles — laissez-faire, democratic, coercive — creating disengaged and confused employees.

The organisation adopted Kotter's 3-phase, 8-step change process combined with their established Kaizen approach to rapid process change. Kaizen became the 'X Factor' ingredient — providing energy to drive quick wins and accelerate employee movement through the change curve towards acceptance.

KEY RESULTS AND BENEFITS



BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGING CHANGE

- A clear vision, reinforced with common goals cascaded throughout the business, keeps alignment and engagement to deliver transformation in full and on-time
- Maintaining a sense of urgency with full employee engagement drives rapid and positive change
- Promote a culture of continuous improvement and encourage employee involvement at all levels in Kaizen activities
- Lean expertise should be available to facilitate Kaizen events and deliver training on lean tools to allow functions to drive improvements
- Culture takes time to change — be patient and consistent with your change approach
- Trust and respect everyone's opinion as this fosters greater employee engagement

"Kaizen was the X Factor ingredient — providing the energy to drive quick wins and rapid change that no other approach could deliver."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Leadership style matters

Situational leadership — adapting style to individual employee needs throughout the grief cycle — is critical to successfully navigating post-M&A change.

Structure drives success

Following Kotter's structured 8-step model prevents the common errors that cause change programmes to stall, lose momentum, or fail entirely.

Kaizen accelerates acceptance

Kaizen events give employees at all levels a voice, a sense of ownership, and rapid visible wins — the most effective accelerant through the change curve.

Culture is the foundation

Without addressing barriers to culture — trust, openness, and teamworking — even well-structured change programmes risk costly delays or outright failure.