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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

Rapid Transformation	Customer Value	Employee Engagement	Lean Inventory
Process change completed over focused days, not months	Improved via elimination of process waste and lead-time reduction	Increased morale through team empowerment and cross-functional working	Reduction in inventory through introduction of Lean principles

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.