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A complexity theory perspective of kaizen: a study in healthcare

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Abstract

Kaizen projects (KPs) change the interactions between the elements of socio-technical systems, and therefore their impacts cannot be fully controlled. By using complexity theory as a lens for making sense of interactions, this study proposes a nine-step framework for assessing and influencing KPs planned, under way, and completed. The most innovative part of the framework is the assessment of the interactions within and between KPs. A study of five KPs carried out in the process of preparation and administration of medications in a surgical ward illustrates the use of the framework. Based on this study and extant theory, seven design propositions that support the framework application were devised. Also, the use of the framework produces descriptive data that sheds light on nuances and unintended consequences of kaizen.

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