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The Management of Operations

Volume 30, 2019 - [Issue 16](#)

1,391 | 29

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A complexity theory perspective of kaizen: a study in healthcare

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Pages 1337-1353 | Received 19 Jul 2018, Accepted 15 Apr 2019, Published online: 17 May 2019

Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/09537287.2019.1615649>



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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.

Keywords:

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Additional information

Funding

The authors are thankful to the agencies Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul (FAPERGS) [17/2551-0001190-2] and Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) [88887.153859/2017-00] for partially funding this research.

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