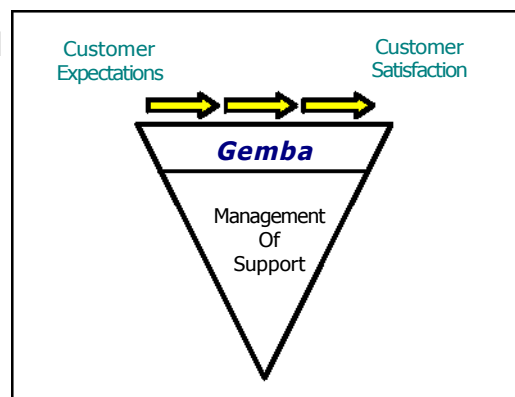


## Gemba: An Inclusive Approach

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A traditional organisation can be thought of as a pyramid with 'senior management' at the top and front line staff at the bottom. This type of organisation will be littered with reminders that those at the top of the pyramid are 'the most important people' such as reserved parking for Directors outside the main entrance, separate dining areas and plush ivory tower offices.

A Kaizen organisation on the other hand, considers that the most important place is where the value is added to customers or the 'Gemba' in Japanese. The 'feel' of the organisation is an inverted pyramid with those doing the work at the top - managers now seeing their role as supporting those in their teams above them.



There many other cultural shifts that define a Kaizen organisation. A Kaizen approach flourishes most in a culture of ownership and trust. Introducing team based problem solving into an organisation where there is little or no trust and little in the way of empowerment will severely hamper progress.

A Kaizen approach is actually asking people in the organisation to accept the belief from management that "we trust you, we are keen to involve you in improving the way this organisation works because you know the issues and the solutions that will improve things – you deal with them every day".

However if people are surrounded by conflicting messages - for example from autocratic styles of leadership - then reluctance to participate can often be the result. Therefore in the early stages, leaders must reflect on their style of leadership and identify the behaviours they exhibit that send the message 'we trust you' and do more of those.

Secondly, the internal & external customer orientation of people in the organisation is key. Whilst traditional organisations are typically organised into functional silos, the value is added to the customer in processes that work laterally across the organisation. It is essential therefore that a team can grasp the overall process in which they play a part: that they know who their customers are, their requirements and how to improve them now and in the future.

The work of James Kouzes and Barry Posner, authors of *The Leadership Challenge*, provides a further insight into the leadership behaviours that help transform an organisation. Applying these principles to the role of leaders in developing a Kaizen philosophy also provides a useful insight into the challenge of enabling change.