

# The Concept of *Kaizen*: A Root Exploration

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## ABSTRACT

The *Kaizen* concept laid the foundation for the rapid growth of Japanese institutions. (Imai 1986). The *Kaizen* concept was developed by further developing the concept of Western management, which examines organizational progress from two perspectives: maintenance and growth. Accordingly, growth is categorized as *Kaizen* and innovation. Of these, *Kaizen* means continuous growth. It refers to the growth that takes place until the arrival of an innovation. This means that *Kaizen* is an endless journey. Provides answers to every little problem encountered during this trip. Everyone's support is sought for that. Second, it standardizes those answers. Nor does that standard last long. Or there is no obligation to stay that way. Breaks existing standards and adopts new ones. The journey is continuous and systematic. It is also progressive as it often moves from one standard to a higher standard. This new management thinking is intertwined with Japanese culture. It shows collective social characteristics. The purpose of this article is to analyze the ancient practice of the concept of continuous growth, called *Kaizen* by the Japanese. For that, the way in which Gautama Buddha solved the problems of monks 2600 years ago is being investigated. There, the manner in which the Buddha acted in imposing discipline on the vessel under the *Buddhakavattundaka* of the *Chullawaggapaliya* in the *Vinaya Pitaka* is examined. 29 issues that arose from time to time regarding the bowl and the solutions given to them were examined. At first glance those problems are simple. But the Buddha did not ignore those problems. All those problems have been solved. All of those solutions were standardized at the same time. It never took long for a complete solution. The question is answered as much and as needed. The principles of the *Kaizen* concept are very similar to those of the Supreme Buddha's method of problem solving. It is therefore more justifiable to regard Buddhist philosophy as the source of the *Kaizen* concept.

**Key Words:** Kaizen, Buddhist Philosophy, Root, Improvement, Innovation

## INTRODUCTION

The Sri Lankan society is also a collective society shaped by an agrarian economy. But the management concepts on which collectivity is based have not been adequately developed by Sri Lankans. The socio-cultural environment of a country influences its management practices (Khan, Mohammad & Panarina, Ekaterina (2017). Despite this, Western management concepts are being used by Sri Lankan managers for corporate management without any judgment. Management is scientific only until it collides with objects. But the basic foundation of management is man. His behavior is determined by the environment in which he lives. Or by his culture. Therefore, Western management concepts developed in a society based on individualism need to be more scrutinized in the application or adaptation to Asian societies built on a collective social culture. It is best to study your culture and adapt your management concepts to your business management. The Japanese management system was created to meet such a need. People are well aware of the concept of management that emerges from their culture. They accept concepts more quickly

and easily because they are not alien to them. The primary purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the extent to which Buddhism could be used to create management concepts based on the culture of Sri Lankans, if not more familiar to them. Understanding culture makes it easier to generate new management concepts. For this purpose, one of the texts used in the Tripitaka is to investigate the manner in which the Supreme Buddha acted in the construction of the disciplines for the vessel mentioned in the *Buddhakavattundaka* belonging to the *Chullawaggapaliya* of the *Vinaya Pitaka*.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

Information for this study will be compiled based on two sources, Buddhist philosophy and *Kaizen* philosophy. This is because it compares the *Kaizen* philosophy of the twentieth century with the Buddhist philosophy of the fifth century BC. Of the many sutras that contain Buddhist philosophy, however, this comparison will be limited to one sutra which deals with the formulation of disciplinary rules regarding the bowl.

### The gradual development of the disciplinary procedure on the bowl: (Buddhakavaththundaka)

It is not correct to assume that the rules regarding the design and use of the bowl were created at the same time. Although there is not enough historical evidence to pinpoint the time taken for that, the *Buddhakavattundaka* testifies that considerable time has elapsed for the legislation. Legislation regarding the use of the bowl is the result of solving 29 problems that arise from time to time. Not all of these problems arise at once. After answering one question regarding the use of the bowl, a new problem arises with another monk. In this way, the answers to the problems that arise from time to time can be seen only to the extent of the problem. Since *Sangha Samajiya* is a social institution, some of the problems related to the use of the bowl by the monks arise from the society. These problems have arisen out of the general society's view or expectation of the monks' society. In such a case, the answer is displayed in a manner that meets the expectations of the party to whom the problem arises. The problems and answers that contributed to the gradual development of the use of the bowl can be summarized as follows.

Table No. 01: The Alignment of the Legislation for the Bowl

Serial Number	The Point is	Problem	Answer
01	<i>Indu Pelahara</i> from the point of a wooden bowl	People despise monks	Break the wooden bowl; Indra procession should not be shown
02	'Bowls' of various sizes, large and small, made of gold and silver are used	People despise monks	'Bowls' made of <i>Ranmuwa</i> (gold), <i>Ridimuwa</i> (silver), <i>Minimuwa</i> (gems), <i>Weraluminimuwa</i> , <i>Pilingumuwa</i> , <i>Kanlohomuwa</i> , <i>Kalu Iiyamuwa</i> , <i>Sudu Iiyamuwa</i> , and <i>Viidurumuwa</i> (Glasses) should not be used.  Bowls made of <i>yamuwa</i> and clay are approved
03	Collides when placing the bowl	The bowl is prone to breakage and decay	A paddle (bowl foot) is approved

04	Ranmuwa (made of gold), Ridimuwa (made of silver), high and low (various) paddles are used	People despise monks	Do not use high or low paddle <i>Kalu Iyammuwa</i> (made of black lead), <i>Sudu Iyammuwa</i> (made of white lead) paddles approved
05	Thick paddles do not fit in the bowl	Incompatibility of bowl and paddles	Paddles are allowed to be thinned by crushing
06	Wrinkles	Wrinkling	It is recommended to cut the teeth on the paddle
07	Use decorative painted paddles	People despise monks	Do not use fancy paddles Simple paddles are recommended
08	Place the bowl with the water in it	The bowl becomes dirty	The bowl with the water should not be stored The bowl should be heated and stored
09	Heat a bowl of water.	The bowl stinks	The bowl with water should not be heated Remove the water, heat the bowl and set aside
10	Keep the bowl on high heat	The bowl is discolored	Do not put the bowl in the heat It is recommended to keep the bowl in the heat for a short time and put it back in a suitable place
11	Leaves the bowl outdoors without a support	The bowl is overturned and shattered by the wind	A support for the bowl is approved
12	Place the bowl at the end of the verandah	The bowl falls off and breaks	The bowl should not be placed at the end of the verandah
13	Place the bowl on <i>Paribhandaya</i> (the small verandah outside the verandah)	The bowl falls off and breaks	Do not place the bowl on <i>Paribhandaya</i> (the small verandah outside the verandah)
14	The bowl rests face down on the floor	The edge of the bowl is eroded by touching the floor	A lawn mat is approved
15	The grass mat destroys the termite	Destruction of grass mat termite	A cloth is allowed to hold the bowl
16	The fabric is eaten by termite	Destruction of fabric by termite	A verandah is allowed to place the bowl

17	Bowls fall and break from the verandah	The bowl falls off and breaks	<i>Pathrakanodhawak</i> (bowl basket) approved
18	The bowl in the bowl basket decays by hitting	Depletion of the bowl	A wallet is allowed to hold the bowl
19	There is no support to hold the bowl.	No support to hold the bowl	A support for hanging the bowl is approved ( <i>Urabandanawa</i> and <i>Indana Huya</i> )
20	Hanging the bowl on the wall	Falls and breaks	The bowl should not hang
21	Lay the bowl on the bed	Sitting subconsciously breaks the bowl	The bowl should not be placed on the bed
22	Place the bowl on the chair	Sitting subconsciously breaks the bowl	The bowl should not be placed on the chair
23	Place the bowl on the lap	Stands with subconscious. The bowl falls off and breaks	The bowl should not be placed on the lap
24	Put the bowl in the <i>jathraya</i>	The wind shakes the <i>Jathraya</i> . The bowl falls off and breaks	The bowl should not be left in the <i>Jathraya</i>
25	Hold the bowl and open the window	The bowl breaks when the window is turned over	Do not take the bowl by hand and open the window
26	They go begging with a 'bottle Gourd shells in their hand	People despise monks. Blame	Do not take bottle gourd sells and beg
27	They take an old broken pot and go begging	People despise monks. Blame	Don't go begging with an old broken pot
28	They carry skulls and go begging	People despise monks. Blame	Do not use the skulls bowl
29	Keep the waste in the bowl	People despise monks. Blame	Garbage should not be kept in the same bowl. A separate container is recommended

**Source:** Vinaya Pitaka, Chullawaggapali, Buddhakavattundaka

Table 1 above describes how the rules regarding the use of the bowl were formulated. Accordingly, it is further confirmed that 29 rules have been framed regarding the use of the bowl and how those disciplinary rules have been formulated based on issues that have arisen from time to time.

### **Kaizen Philosophy**

The Japanese word *Kaizen* is a combination of the two Japanese words *Kai* and *Zen*. *Kai* means to change, and *Zen* means better (Palmer 2001, Rof, 2012). Accordingly, the meaning of the word *Kaizen* is change for the better. Or continuous growth. Continuous growth is considered to be one of the most widely used management strategies in the current management context for product excellence (Dean and Robinson,

1991). The *Kaizen* process is considered to be an endless process (Jagdeep Singh and Harwinder Singh (2009) that takes place with the cooperation of everyone in the organization (Malik and Yezhuang, 2006). According to Masaki Imaai, the creator of the *Kaizen* concept, *Kaizen* is an umbrella concept. *Kaizen's* concept is aimed at establishing a soft workplace, eliminating unnecessary and difficult tasks (mental and physical), teaching employees to experiment quickly using scientific techniques, and eliminating unnecessary waste of process. The *Kaizen* philosophy is based on five basic theories. These are: 1. Trust in teamwork 2. Everyone's ideas have value and should be taken into account 3. Even if the organization is in good working order, everyone's active participation should be obtained by getting suggestions for the continued growth of the organization 4. There is always an opportunity for growth 5. Use of quality circles. When solving problems, teams work together to come up with new solutions.

These theories of the *Kaizen* concept are directly linked to Japanese cultural values (Sosnovskikh, Sergey 2016). *Kaizen* strategies ultimately lead to human resource development (Ramezani and Razmeh 2014). The *Kaizen* concept applies not only to one group of employees in the organization but to all management levels as well as other employees. This also applies to all management functions such as manufacturing, marketing, human resources and finance and applied to all types of organizations ([Nageswara Rao Posinasetti](#) 2014)

## ANALYSIS

Eight of the above 29 issues (table no 1) have arisen within contemporary society. They are a social issue based on people despise monks and blame. The other twenty-one issues are related to the use of the bowl. The approach taken by the Buddha in answering these questions is very simple. Often, a very short answer is given to the problem that arises. Only occasionally can an alternative proposal be seen to be added. Such new proposals have been added only if necessary and to the extent necessary. When the problem is addressed within the society, no answer is given which does not reflect the opinion of the society. In that case, it is prudent to give an answer that confirms the will of the society. An examination of this answering policy reveals two principles. The first is to answer only the extent of the existing problem. This implies that the reply was not delayed in the hope of providing a complete solution. A methodology has been adopted to allow the problem to arise and to provide an adequate answer to it. The second strategy is to specify each answer. Or that the answer is passed as a rule. It is always stated that if anyone acts outside the legalized answer, he will be harmed. This means that the same mistake is not expected to happen again. Or it could be considered the beginning of the best practice strategy in the modern Western management knowledge domain. This practice blocks access to repetitive answers to the same problem. Therefore, only a new problem is likely to re-emerge. There are two roots to the new problem. One way is for a problem to arise from a new source. Otherwise, a new problem may arise with the help of a previous decision. It is the second source. In such a case the answer should be given because the previous answer was a problem. It coincides with the incremental approach currently being used under the Japanese Management Knowledge Domain. In this way, the following process can be easily identified by the methodology of answering questions under the Buddha's philosophy.

1. Wait until the question arises
2. Answering only the specific question
3. Answer only the extent of the problem that arises
4. Answer the question regardless of the size of the question
5. Always address the issue in a way that meets the needs of the team raising the issue
6. Pass each answer

*Kaizen's* role is to find solutions to every problem and to standardize those solutions. Its specialty is the continuous development of those standards. Standards that are considered in terms of Western management

knowledge are firm. Even so, the standardizations considered under the *Kaizen* concept are not permanent in that way. Standardization under the *Kaizen* methodology is soft. Existing standards can be broken at any time in order to move towards better standards (Imai, 1997)

According to Slobodan 2011, the *Kaizen* concept is based on nine theories. That is,

1. Exclusion of consensus ideas that are specific, traditional or customary
2. Just thinking about how to do it. Not looking for reasons not to
3. Finding alternatives that question the existing methodology, even if not completely successful
4. If an error occurs, correct it
5. Based on wisdom. Not based on money
6. Not expecting a completion. Start work if 50% successful
7. Identify the cause of the problem by asking the question why five times
8. Trusting in the wisdom of ten rather than the knowledge of one
9. Not telling employees to keep their brains at the gate and enter

*Kaizen* describes the continuous growth that takes place in personal life, domestic life, social life, and professional life (Suárez Barraza et al. 2013). It is clear that the expectation of the *Kaizen* concept is that continuous growth will take place based on the participation of the entire staff of an organization (Janji?, Vesna et al. 2019). *Kaizen* does not expect to make as much financial investment as innovation (Besta, Petr & Lenort, Radim 2008). The main investment here is the active participation of the entire workforce, not money. Management motivates staff to streamline the existing infrastructure without further investment in the existing system (Imai 1986). This can only be done in an environment where employees are aware of every aspect of their organization (Imai 2001).

## DISCUSSION

According to Buddhist philosophy, the Buddha is considered an omniscient man. Some of the facts pointed out by the Buddha's philosophy have already been verified by existing science. Also, some issues are more complex and further delay in understanding. Only a limited number of people are interested in studying the *Abhidharma Pitaka*, which explains a deeper philosophy. But the *Sutra Pitaka* and the *Vinaya Pitaka* are relatively less complex. It is possible to understand those texts by careful use. The disciplinary textbook covers most of the issues related to organizational management. It contains the decisions taken in building, maintaining and developing the 'Sangha Society' and the factors that led to those decisions. This, in good use, shows how the 'General Manager' has been instrumental in building, maintaining and developing the 'Sangha Society'. The 'General Manager' here is the Supreme Buddha. The manner in which he acted there is very similar to the manner in which a ruler of an institution acts, rather than the behavior of a Buddha who points the way to *Nirvana*. The most striking feature of that control is that it allows even the smallest issues to surface. Therefore, all the problems that arise in the *Sasana* society will be exposed. The management environment set up for that helps. Often, they are not significant problems, but they do not block access to the surface. Moreover, no matter how small the problem, it does not prevent them from being solved. It also goes beyond solving the problem and always takes steps to 'standardize' the given solution. The essence of modern Japanese management is the same.

## CONCLUSION

It seems fair to consider the *Vinaya Pitaka*, one of the three *Pitakas* incorporating Buddhist philosophy, as the source of the *Kaizen* concept of Japanese management.

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