

# HUMAN RESOURCE PERFORMANCE IN MAINTAINING PREMIUM ELECTRONIC PRODUCT QUALITY: A REVIEW OF KAIZEN PHILOSOPHY AND COUNTRY OF ORIGIN EFFECT

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## ABSTRACT

*This literature review examines the internalization of Kaizen philosophy within human resources and its correlation with performance consistency in the premium electronics industry, while also analyzing how the country of origin effect shapes workers' professional identity. The study employs a qualitative literature review method, synthesizing theoretical perspectives from management, organizational behavior, and cross-cultural psychology. The analysis reveals that Kaizen internalization transforms individual consciousness through personal discipline, employee empowerment, systematic thinking habits, and intrinsic motivation reinforcement, enabling workers to maintain quality standards autonomously. Simultaneously, the Made in Japan label creates a complex psychological landscape where workers navigate between imported standards and local values through continuous identity negotiation. Successful internalization occurs when workers achieve authentic appropriation of these values, making quality preservation an expression of professional self-identity rather than mere procedural compliance. The theoretical contribution lies in bridging the gap between quality philosophy and individual performance through psychological mechanisms, while extending country of origin discourse to internal organizational dynamics. Practically, this review suggests that companies should design cultural development programs addressing affective dimensions and create cross-cultural dialogues enabling workers to integrate global standards with local wisdom harmoniously, ensuring sustainable quality consistency in premium electronic products.*

**Key Words :** *Kaizen, value internalization, HR performance, product consistency, country of origin, professional identity, premium electronics.*

## INTRODUCTION

Premium electronic products bearing Japanese brands such as Sony, Panasonic, or Canon have long occupied a privileged position in the consciousness of global consumers. The designation "Made in Japan" is frequently associated with convictions of reliability, high precision, and product durability. This conviction is not merely a superficial perception but rather a social construct formed from accumulated experiences and lengthy narratives concerning work ethic and dedication to quality. For consumers, purchasing premium electronic products involves not only ownership of an object but also obtaining assurance of peace of mind and symbolic pride (Donzé & Borel, 2019). This strong

association between country of origin and quality image constitutes what management literature terms the country-of-origin effect, a factor that significantly shapes preferences and purchasing decisions, particularly in the high-value goods segment (Dao & Heidt, 2018).

However, maintaining such perceptions amidst changing industrial eras constitutes an enormously challenging task (Samuel & Haozhen, 2024). Industries evolve in tandem with societal consumption trends (Gani *et al.*, 2021). Consumer behavior can shift according to trends and developments of the era (Putri & Darmawan, 2025). Mass production, decentralization of factories across various countries, and pressures to reduce costs can erode quality standards

painstakingly built over time (Takei, 2010). Premium consumers possess high sensitivity to inconsistency, regardless of how minor. A defect in a single product unit can immediately trigger questions regarding a brand's eligibility to retain the "premium" designation. In such situations, trust cultivated over decades finds itself in an extremely fragile condition. It can collapse not due to major shocks but rather from accumulated disappointment from repeated minor errors (Kher *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, consistency becomes an absolute keyword.

Product consistency cannot be achieved without systems and culture that support it (Fukuzawa *et al.*, 2018). Herein lies the role of human resources as the frontline of production processes and quality control. Every individual on the production line, from assembly operators to quality control managers, contributes to the final form of the product (Darmawan *et al.*, 2020). Their performance in adhering to standards, detecting anomalies, and implementing continuous improvements constitutes the sole determinant of whether a premium electronic product will exit the factory with appropriate quality or instead prove disappointing (Mitsuyama *et al.*, 2013). In other words, the reputation built by the country-of-origin effect ultimately rests on the quality of workers' daily performance.

The most renowned and admired quality culture originating from Japan is Kaizen (Mui *et al.*, 2022). This philosophy of continuous improvement emphasizes that quality enhancement is everyone's responsibility, conducted daily, through small yet consistent steps (Irina, 2018). Kaizen is not merely a set of tools such as 5S or the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. It constitutes a mindset, a value deeply rooted in employee behavior. Internalization of Kaizen values means instilling awareness that every person is a quality inspector for their own work, that no problem is too small to improve, and that stable processes form the foundation for perfect results. The deeper

this internalization, the stronger the foundation for generating consistent performance (Fukuzawa *et al.*, 2018).

Nevertheless, Kaizen implementation does not occur in a vacuum. The country-of-origin effect, serving as the primary selling point for premium products, simultaneously shapes expectations regarding human resource performance itself (Kalicharan, 2014). There exists an unwritten pressure that employees, wherever the factory may be located, must be capable of emulating work standards from the country of origin, Japan. The perception that Japanese workers possess superior discipline and work ethic frequently becomes a benchmark against which human resource performance in other countries is compared (Irina, 2018). The dynamics between internalization of Kaizen culture and the burden of expectations arising from the country-of-origin effect create a complex condition. Human resource performance is demanded not only to be good but also capable of bridging the philosophical ideals of Kaizen with operational realities on the ground, while simultaneously fulfilling the quality promise inherent in the "Made in Japan" label (Fukuzawa, 2015).

The first problem is rooted in the gap between the philosophical idealism of Kaizen and daily operational practices in maintaining premium product consistency. Kaizen as a philosophy demands fundamental mindset transformation, wherein continuous improvement must become a habit performed voluntarily and unceasingly (Nakamori *et al.*, 2019). Within premium electronics production environments, this demand means that every employee must possess high levels of awareness and initiative to continuously improve their work quality. However, reality often demonstrates that Kaizen practices are reduced to mere formal procedures or monthly programs implemented mechanically (Oki, 2012). Employees may follow instructions without understanding why improvement is necessary, or without feeling ownership

over the improvement process. Consequently, the spirit of improvement does not become part of natural daily movement but rather becomes an additional burden. When philosophy is not properly internalized, quality consistency becomes difficult to maintain because it depends heavily on strict management supervision rather than on drive from within employees themselves (Minh & Quyen, 2022). Thus, how can we measure the extent to which Kaizen values have genuinely integrated with employee mindsets and actions, enabling them to independently drive consistent performance?

The second problem emerges from the interaction between the country-of-origin effect and the formation of professional identity among production line employees. Premium Japanese electronic brands carry with them an aura of high standards associated with Japanese work culture (Gunawan *et al.*, 2022). This association indirectly creates a normative expectation regarding how good employees should work. They are implicitly demanded to emulate the discipline, meticulousness, and dedication stereotypically attributed to workers in the country of origin. This demand can generate complex psychological pressures. On one hand, employees may feel proud to be part of a prestigious brand. On the other hand, they may feel alienated because the standards they must meet seem to be "foreign" standards not entirely authentic to their own work culture identity (Nakamori *et al.*, 2019). This situation can raise questions about how employees make meaning of their work. Are they working to achieve universally good standards, or are they working to emulate "Japanese" standards that may feel foreign? This identity struggle can affect motivation, affective commitment to quality, and ultimately, the consistency of performance they generate.

The premium electronics industry currently stands at a crossroads filled with challenges. Complex global supply chains, accelerated product life cycles,

and continually rising consumer expectations demand that manufacturers operate with unprecedented efficiency and precision (Janjić *et al.*, 2019). Amidst these dynamics, maintaining the purity of quality philosophies such as Kaizen becomes increasingly difficult. Many companies are tempted to sacrifice the "soft" aspects of quality management, such as cultural development, in pursuit of short-term quantitative targets (Nakamori *et al.*, 2019). Yet, precisely when external pressures are greatest, internalization of values such as Kaizen becomes the final bastion preventing quality erosion. Examination of how these values can continue to be enlivened within human resources, not merely memorized as procedures, becomes important for ensuring that the premium designation remains not only a marketing label but is also reflected in every product born from production lines.

The importance of this inquiry is also driven by the need to understand the psychological and sociological dimensions of the workforce in the modern era (Minh & Quyen, 2022). Today's workforce possesses broad access to information, diverse aspirations, and high sensitivity to the meaning of work. Quality management approaches that are overly procedural and top-down tend to be ineffective in generating long-term commitment from such worker groups (Mui *et al.*, 2022). They seek work that provides not only financial rewards but also a sense of belonging, autonomy, and opportunities for growth. Understanding how the country-of-origin effect influences their perceptions of work standards, and how Kaizen values can be internalized in ways congruent with their psychological contexts, constitutes the key to designing more humane and effective human resource development strategies. This inquiry seeks to explore the deepest layers of the relationship among worker identity, corporate philosophy, and the historical burden of a brand, all of which culminate in actual performance in maintaining product consistency.

This study aims to theoretically analyze the process of Kaizen value internalization in human resources and its correlation with achieving consistent performance, particularly in relation to the premium electronics industry. Furthermore, this study is intended to examine how the country-of-origin effect of Japanese brands interacts with employee perceptions, shapes the quality standards they adhere to, and influences their professional identity. By weaving analysis from both aspects, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of human resource management and operations management scholarship, particularly in understanding non-technical factors influencing product quality. The practical contribution is to provide a conceptual framework for managers and industry practitioners in designing more effective corporate culture development programs, which focus not only on procedural aspects but also on value cultivation and understanding of workers' psychological contexts, so that premium brand reputation can be sustainably maintained through superior and consistent human resource performance.

#### RESEARCH METHOD

This study is designed as a qualitative literature review aiming to construct a coherent theoretical understanding regarding the internalization of Kaizen culture and the country-of-origin effect in relation to human resource performance. The literature study method was selected due to its alignment with the research objective, which seeks to examine abstract concepts such as values, perceptions, and professional identity that cannot be measured quantitatively but rather need to be understood through interpretation of documented scholarly thoughts. As explained by Scheurich (2014), a literature study constitutes a series of activities related to methods of collecting library data, reading and recording, and processing research materials. In this process, researchers

engage directly with academic texts rather than with field informants, rendering reading and interpretation techniques fundamental skills that must be mastered. This approach enables researchers to trace the intellectual lineage of experts regarding Kaizen, quality management, organizational behavior, and the country-of-origin effect scattered across various written sources. The data obtained are secondary in nature, originating from second-hand sources, yet it is precisely the richness of interpretation of these static data that constitutes the core of this scholarly activity. Beins (2017) emphasizes that a literature study is not merely an activity of collecting books but rather an analytical process requiring the ability to synthesize various ideas to build a foundation for new knowledge.

This research process was executed through systematic and layered stages, commencing with collection of library materials, followed by editing, organizing, and concluding with discovery of meaning or finding. The library material collection stage was conducted by tracing primary literature discussing Kaizen philosophy from human resource management perspectives, industrial psychology, and studies regarding country of origin and consumer behavior relevant to the premium electronics industry. After materials were collected, the researcher entered the editing stage, namely re-examining the data obtained, particularly regarding completeness and alignment of meaning across sources. The subsequent stage was organizing, wherein the researcher organized the obtained data into a framework designed based on the research questions. This process demanded meticulousness to ensure that each concept was placed in its appropriate position, thereby facilitating subsequent analysis. Patten (2016) emphasizes that qualitative data analysis constitutes an effort conducted by working with data, organizing data, sorting it into manageable units, searching for and finding patterns, and

deciding what can be communicated to others. Finally, at the finding stage, the researcher conducted further analysis using established principles and theories to draw conclusions constituting answers to the research questions. By following this procedure, this study is expected to provide meaningful theoretical contributions without direct field engagement, yet remaining rooted in a robust scholarly tradition.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Internalization of Kaizen and Formation of Consistent Human Resource Performance

A foundational theory elucidating the measurement indicators of Kaizen values within human resources originates from the continuous improvement management concept advanced by Masaaki Imai. In Imai's perspective, Kaizen constitutes a management philosophy emphasizing continuous improvement involving all organizational members, from top management to operational employees. Kaizen values are applied not only to production processes but also become part of individual attitudes and behaviors within the organization (Hailu *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, Kaizen implementation in human resources is reflected in mindsets, commitment to improvement, and active involvement in enhancing work quality.

According to Imai, Kaizen values in employees can be identified through several indicators that reflect an individual's orientation towards continuous improvement. The first indicator is continuous improvement orientation, which is an individual's attitude of always seeking ways to improve work processes, increase efficiency, and produce better quality over time. Employees who have a continuous improvement orientation tend to be dissatisfied with stagnant working conditions and always strive to find more effective working methods.

**Table 1. Indicators Of Kaizen Values In Human Resources**

No	Kaizen Value Indicator	Brief Description
1	Continuous Improvement Orientation	The individual's attitude of constantly seeking to improve quality, efficiency, and work methods over time.
2	Problem-Solving Mindset	The ability and willingness of employees to identify problems and systematically find solutions.
3	Employee Participation in Improvement Activities	Active involvement of employees in providing ideas, suggestions, or contributions to quality improvement programs.
4	Work Discipline	Consistency of employees in following established procedures and operational standards.
5	Teamwork and Collaboration	The ability to cooperate with team members to achieve collective process improvements.

The second indicator is a problem-solving mindset, namely the individual's ability and willingness to identify problems emerging in work processes and to seek solutions systematically. Within Kaizen philosophy, problems are viewed as opportunities for improvement. Therefore, employees are encouraged not to ignore errors or inefficiencies but rather to utilize them as foundations for process improvement.

The third indicator is employee participation in improvement activities, namely the level of employee involvement in organizational improvement initiatives. This participation can manifest through submission of improvement ideas, involvement in team discussions, or contributions to quality enhancement programs. The higher the employee participation in improvement activities, the stronger the implementation of Kaizen values within the organization.

The fourth indicator is discipline in work processes, namely the individual's level of discipline in adhering to established

work standards and operational procedures. In Kaizen practice, compliance with work standards constitutes an important foundation for ensuring process stability before further improvements are undertaken. Therefore, employees possessing strong Kaizen values typically demonstrate consistency in executing work procedures accurately. The final indicator is teamwork and collaboration, namely the individual's ability to cooperate with team members in efforts to achieve work process improvements. Kaizen emphasizes that continuous improvement cannot be accomplished individually but rather requires collaboration and effective communication among organizational members.

Overall, the Kaizen theory advanced by Imai emphasizes that Kaizen values in human resources are reflected in attitudes supporting continuous improvement, problem-solving abilities, active participation in quality enhancement activities, discipline in executing work processes, and ability to collaborate in teams. These indicators can be utilized to assess the extent to which Kaizen values have been internalized in employee work behavior within organizations.

The process of internalizing Kaizen values within human resources constitutes a lengthy journey involving transformation of individual consciousness. Kaizen as a philosophy of continuous improvement will never materialize if understood merely as a collection of technical procedures to be followed (Ghaleb, 2025). It demands fundamental change in how one perceives work, problems, and responsibility. An employee who has internalized Kaizen values will view every minor error as a golden opportunity for learning, every obstacle as an invitation to innovate, and every established process as something that can always be refined. This shift in perspective does not occur instantaneously but rather through consistent learning and habituation processes over time (Redko, 2022).

Company management must understand that building such awareness requires substantial investment of time and energy, far exceeding mere technical skills training. It touches the affective and spiritual realms of working, wherein employees feel ownership of their work and pride in the quality produced. Without deep-seated ownership, it is impossible for anyone to diligently undertake small improvements daily on their own initiative.

The formation of performance consistency through Kaizen commences with cultivation of extremely rigorous personal discipline (Naseri & Esa, 2025). This philosophy teaches that quality is not the result of inspection at process end but rather the product of every small step executed correctly from the beginning. A premium electronics production line operator must possess awareness that soldering one connection perfectly, installing one screw with proper torque, or meticulously inspecting one panel constitutes direct contribution to brand reputation. This personal discipline is built through understanding that every action has consequences, and that excellence can only be achieved through continuous repetition of correct actions. Consistency is born from habit, and habit is born from conscious repetition performed with full awareness. Employees trained in Kaizen discipline will never feel bored with routine work because they consistently find new challenges in refining their work methods. Comprehensive organizational systems guarantee product quality through synergy of multidimensional competencies (Darmawan, 2024). They understand that perfection is a goal never fully attained, yet it is precisely the journey toward it that imbues their work with meaning.

Employee empowerment constitutes a key element in the successful Kaizen internalization process (Ghaleb, 2025). This philosophy cannot thrive in hierarchical and authoritarian work environments where every decision must await supervisor. Decisions made need to

consider existing social conditions (Musyafak & Darmawan, 2025). Kaizen actually requires the opposite, namely an environment that provides trust and authority to every individual to identify problems and undertake improvement actions. A production line worker is the person who best understands the details of their work, therefore they should be the first person granted the right to voice improvement ideas. Wise management will create mechanisms enabling every suggestion, regardless of how small, to be heard and valued. Workers become the primary pillars in achieving product quality (Hariani *et al.*, 2021). When employees feel that their opinions are valued and their contributions matter, deep-seated ownership of the company and its products develops. This sense of ownership constitutes the fuel for long-term performance consistency. Employees no longer work merely to meet targets set by superiors but rather work to fulfill quality standards they establish themselves as an expression of professional pride.

Implementation of the Plan-Do-Check-Act or PDCA cycle in daily work forms systematic thinking habits that support consistency (Karkoszka & Honorowicz, 2009). Kaizen does not allow improvement to occur by chance or based on intuition alone but rather through structured scientific processes. Employees accustomed to this cycle will always plan their work thoroughly before acting, examine their work results after completion, and undertake corrective actions if deviations are found. This habit, if practiced continuously, will form a *mindset* always vigilant toward potential problems and always ready to make adjustments. In the premium electronics industry where error tolerance is extremely minimal, this systematic thinking habit becomes a powerful defense against product defects (Tekin *et al.*, 2018). Every individual becomes the company's eyes and ears, constantly alert to detecting anomalies regardless of size. They will not allow a single defective product unit to proceed

to the next process because they understand that one defect alone can destroy consumer trust built over many years. Thus, quality consistency is maintained not because of supervision but because every person feels called to safeguard it.

The culture of saving face or avoiding confrontation often constitutes a primary obstacle in quality improvement processes within many organizations (Silva *et al.*, 2019). Kaizen actually teaches the opposite, namely that problems must be confronted openly and honestly. In premium production environments, concealing errors is an extremely dangerous act because small errors not promptly corrected can develop into major problems harming many parties. Successful Kaizen internalization is marked by employee courage to report errors they make or discover, without fear of punishment or reproach (Naseri & Esa, 2025). They understand that finding problems is the first step toward improvement, not a disgrace to be covered up. Management must be capable of creating psychological safety enabling this openness to thrive. The higher the perceived risk, the lower the tendency to act (Cahyani & Darmawan, 2025). When employees feel safe acknowledging errors, they learn faster and improvement processes proceed more smoothly. Long term, this honesty builds a solid foundation of trust between management and workers, and this trust becomes the organizational adhesive in facing various complex quality challenges.

Performance consistency is also substantially determined by the extent to which Kaizen values are internalized within company reward and recognition systems (Janjić *et al.*, 2018). Humans fundamentally will repeat behaviors that bring positive consequences for themselves. Individual behavior can influence outcomes achieved (Darmawan, 2013). If companies only reward those achieving highest production targets, without attention to how those targets are achieved,

employees will tend to sacrifice quality in pursuit of quantity. Conversely, if reward systems are designed to appreciate those who consistently produce the best quality and those actively contributing improvement ideas, then desired behaviors will increasingly strengthen. Rewards need not always be material; public recognition of someone's contribution in team meetings or providing opportunities to lead improvement projects often possesses stronger motivational effects. Employees whose contributions are valued will develop stronger emotional bonds with the company (Spasojević-Brkić *et al.*, 2020). These emotional bonds drive them to work wholeheartedly, not merely to fulfill obligations. Under such conditions, quality consistency emerges naturally from within, not imposed from without.

Kaizen application in premium electronics production contexts also demands standardization that is both rigorous yet flexible (Silva *et al.*, 2019). Standardization is necessary to ensure that every product produced possesses identical quality, regardless of who performs the work or when it is performed. However, rigid standardization can kill employee initiative and creativity for improvement. Kaizen teaches that standards must always be improved. Every time an employee discovers a better way to perform their work, existing standards must be promptly updated so that the entire team can adopt the new method. This process creates a continuously rotating improvement cycle, wherein standardization and innovation proceed hand in hand. Employees no longer view standards as shackles limiting their movement but rather as footholds for leaping higher (Kumar & Bhamu, 2021). They are motivated to continuously seek more efficient, more accurate, and safer ways of working. This continuous improvement spirit constitutes the engine driving long-term performance consistency. Companies capable of

creating such culture will always be one step ahead of their competitors.

The role of leadership in the Kaizen internalization process cannot be overstated. A leader is not sufficient merely issuing commands or instructions from behind a desk. They must go directly to the production line, see with their own eyes what is happening, speak with workers, and demonstrate exemplary behavior in applying Kaizen principles. The concept known as Genchi Genbutsu in Japanese management teaches that true understanding can only be obtained by directly observing the place where events occur. Leaders who come to the factory floor come not to find subordinate errors but to understand challenges they face and assist in finding solutions. The presence of sincere, caring leaders will build strong emotional bonds with workers. They feel noticed and valued as human beings, not merely as factors of production (Ghaleb, 2025). This feeling of being valued drives high loyalty and commitment to the company and its product quality. In situations where work pressure is extremely high, it is this loyalty and commitment that will cause employees to persist and give their best, rather than giving up or seeking shortcuts detrimental to quality.

The Kaizen internalization process is also heavily influenced by the extent to which these values are enlivened in daily social interactions among employees (Spasojević-Brkić *et al.*, 2020). Kaizen is not a matter of individuals alone but rather a collective movement requiring active participation from everyone. Discussions among coworkers about improving processes, mutually reminding each other when observing errors, and sharing best practices constitute tangible manifestations of living Kaizen values in daily life. These positive social interactions create supportive work environments and reinforce collective commitment to quality (Oki, 2012). When a new employee joins, they will rapidly absorb values alive within the community through social learning processes. They

will learn that in this place, quality is non-negotiable and everyone cares about it. Peer social pressure is often more effective in shaping behavior compared to pressure from superiors. If someone observes that all coworkers work with thoroughness and dedication, they will feel ashamed if working carelessly. Thus, performance consistency is maintained through natural, humane social surveillance mechanisms.

In the premium electronics industry, high product complexity demands close collaboration across various functions and departments. Kaizen teaches that improvement should not be confined to one section alone but rather must involve the entire process chain from upstream to downstream (Macpherson *et al.*, 2018). A product designer must understand the implications of their design for production and assembly ease. Procurement must ensure that purchased components meet required quality standards. Production must be capable of translating design specifications into tangible products with high precision. When all sections work in a spirit of shared improvement, synergy is created yielding superior quality. Kaizen internalization here means that everyone understands their work is connected to others' work, and that final product quality is a collective responsibility, not merely the quality control section's responsibility. This understanding drives more open communication and closer collaboration across sections. Effective communication helps build positive perceptions (Nahar *et al.*, 2025). Barriers between departments gradually crumble, replaced by a spirit of cooperation to achieve shared goals, namely producing the best products for consumers.

Performance consistency also requires sound documentation and organizational learning systems (Rothwell *et al.*, 2020). Every successfully implemented improvement, every successfully resolved problem, must be meticulously documented so that it can become a valuable lesson for all organizational members. Kaizen is not only about

making improvements but also about preserving knowledge gained from those improvement processes. Knowledge management drives worker commitment, which contributes to product quality and organizational competitiveness (Eddine *et al.*, 2023). An employee who discovers a new way to reduce machine setup time must document their finding so that other coworkers, including those who will join in the future, can learn from it. Without proper documentation, valuable knowledge can simply disappear when that employee retires or leaves. Companies that learn from their past experiences will grow stronger day by day and become increasingly capable of facing new challenges (Spasojević-Brkić *et al.*, 2020). The same errors will not recur twice, and best practices will be continuously passed down from generation to generation. This constitutes the tangible manifestation of true continuous improvement, namely the accumulation of knowledge that continuously grows over time and becomes valuable capital for the company's future (Senyk, 2023).

Intrinsic employee motivation plays an exceedingly important role in maintaining long-term performance consistency (Arrasyid & Amaliyah, 2019). Kaizen essentially concerns doing one's best not because someone is watching or because of bonus incentives but rather because of internal drive to produce quality work. Employees possessing strong intrinsic motivation will feel unsatisfied if their work is not perfect. They possess high personal quality standards, often exceeding standards set by the company (Bassi *et al.*, 2020). Building this intrinsic motivation requires a different approach from merely providing material incentives. Employees need to be given deep understanding of the meaning of their work, about how the products they produce are used by consumers, and about their contribution to others' satisfaction and happiness. This satisfaction becomes an indicator of business success (Safira *et al.*, 2025).

When a worker understands that the television they assemble will become a source of entertainment for a family, or that the camera they inspect will be used to capture precious moments in someone's life, then their work becomes meaningful. Meaningful work is done with heart, and work results originating from the heart always possess exceptional quality.

The greatest challenge in the Kaizen internalization process is maintaining the spirit of improvement amidst tedious routine (Ghaleb, 2025). Day after day performing the same tasks can easily dull awareness and cause one to work mechanically without thought. Kaizen offers a way out of this routine trap by continuously challenging employees to discover better work methods. Every day is a new opportunity to do something better than yesterday. This challenge keeps work interesting and provides a sense of achievement each time improvement is successfully accomplished. Employees accustomed to this mindset will never feel bored because there is always an improvement target to be achieved. They view work not as boring routine but as a series of interesting challenges to be overcome. Long-term performance consistency can only be maintained if employees possess internal motivational sources that never run dry (Yamaguchi & Kono, 2017). Kaizen provides that motivational source by transforming work into a continuous, unending improvement game. Sustainability constitutes a strategic agenda demanding organizational management (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2021). Business strategy constitutes an integration of decisions and actions systematically arranged to direct the utilization of organizational core competencies in maintaining competitive advantage (Ali & Darmawan, 2023).

Successful Kaizen internalization will be reflected in the organization's ability to maintain product quality at the highest level consistently, even amidst various pressures and changes (Minh & Quyen,

2022). Managerial competence becomes key in mastering the dynamics of change (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). When Kaizen values have become integrated into the very fabric of every employee, quality is no longer a matter requiring control but rather becomes the natural character of the organization. Every individual moves automatically toward perfection, mutually complementing and strengthening one another within a harmonious system (Sugara *et al.*, 2021). In this ideal condition, premium electronics companies can breathe easier because their reputation rests in capable hands. Employees not only maintain product quality but also safeguard the dignity and honor of the brand painstakingly built over many years. They are aware that they constitute the frontline determining whether consumers will maintain trust or begin turning to other brands. This awareness is what drives them to work carefully, meticulously, and with full dedication, so that every product leaving the factory deserves to bear the premium label and uphold the good name of the country of origin attached to it.

#### **Country of Origin Effect and Dynamics of Worker Professional Identity**

The country-of-origin effect in the Japanese premium electronics industry creates a complex psychological landscape for production line workers. The Made in Japan label attached to products is not merely a geographical marker but rather a symbol of quality laden with historical and cultural significance. Consumers worldwide have long associated Japan with technological excellence, high precision, and product reliability. This association creates exceedingly high expectations for every product emerging from Japanese electronics factories, regardless of the physical location of those factories (Mui *et al.*, 2022). Workers directly involved in production processes are aware of this burden of expectation. They understand that the results of their work will be evaluated not only by superiors but also

by consumers possessing strong convictions regarding the superiority of Japanese products. This awareness creates unique psychological pressure, wherein every minor error can be interpreted as betrayal of trust built over decades. Psychological and emotional aspects influence an individual's personal state (Irfan & Darmawan, 2021). Workers are responsible not only for meeting technical standards but also symbolically responsible for maintaining a nation's reputation.

Worker perceptions of Japanese work standards are often formed through various channels before they actually enter the industrial world (Ghaleb, 2025). Media, documentaries, and word-of-mouth stories have constructed an image of Japanese workers as individuals characterized by strong discipline, loyalty, and high dedication to work. Information disseminated through word of mouth can shape product perceptions (Yusuf *et al.*, 2025). When an individual begins working at a Japanese electronics company, they carry these perceptions as part of their initial orientation. These perceptions can serve as positive guidance, providing direction regarding expected behaviors and how a professional worker should conduct themselves. However simultaneously, these perceptions can also become burdensome when workers feel that such standards are too high and difficult to achieve. The gap between the ideal perception of Japanese workers and the reality of one's own capabilities can generate feelings of insecurity and anxiety. Workers may feel that they will never be able to attain the level of discipline and dedication possessed by their counterparts in the country of origin, thus they work in the shadow of lingering doubt (Fukuzawa *et al.*, 2018). The process of forming worker professional identity within environments saturated with the country-of-origin effect unfolds dialectically (Kalicharan, 2014). At one pole stand values and standards imported from Japan, regarded as ideal standards to be

achieved. At the other pole stand local values and work methods already deeply rooted in workers prior to joining the company. Professional identity is formed through continuous negotiation between these two poles. Workers do not simply abandon their cultural identity and fully adopt Japanese identity, yet neither can they entirely maintain old work methods if they wish to meet required quality standards. They must discover a synthesis enabling them to work effectively without feeling alienated from their own identity (Widianti *et al.*, 2024). This identity negotiation process unfolds personally and subjectively, varying between individuals depending on their backgrounds, experiences, and adaptive capacities (Shearman, 2013). The final outcome of this process substantially determines the extent to which workers can consistently deliver their best performance.

The experience of working under standards originating from foreign cultures often raises existential questions about the meaning of work (Shearman, 2013). Workers may wonder whether they work because they genuinely believe in the values espoused by the company, or whether they merely follow instructions without full understanding. This question becomes increasingly sharp when the standards implemented feel foreign and misaligned with daily habits (Koppman *et al.*, 2016). A worker accustomed to flexible, relaxed work approaches may experience significant difficulty when confronted with demands for strict Japanese-style discipline. They may comply with rules due to fear of sanctions, yet their heart remains absent from the compliance process. Such conditions produce fragile performance, because once external pressure diminishes, work quality tends to decline (Ishii, 2012). Value internalization does not occur authentically but rather constitutes mere surface compliance lacking durability. To achieve long-term consistency, workers need to discover personal meaning in the standards they

execute, so that compliance emerges from conviction rather than compulsion. Symbols attached to Japanese companies, such as uniforms, company songs, slogans, and morning rituals, play important roles in the professional identity formation process (Peltokorpi *et al.*, 2019). These symbols function as daily reminders of the values upheld by the organization and the behaviors expected from each member. For some workers, these symbols can serve as sources of inspiration and pride, reminding them that they are part of a long tradition of excellence. However for other workers, these symbols may feel foreign and imposed, generating silent resistance that erodes commitment. Disparities in perception regarding company symbols often go unrecognized by management, which may assume that all workers receive these symbols in the same way. Yet the meaning of a symbol is never singular and universal but rather is always reinterpreted by each individual based on their background and life experiences. Failure to understand this diversity of interpretation can render cultural development policies ineffective and even counterproductive.

The country-of-origin effect also influences the dynamics of relationships between local workers and Japanese expatriate managers stationed at factories (Fujimoto, 2020). The presence of Japanese managers is often regarded as a symbol of authenticity, guaranteeing that quality standards will be maintained according to original specifications. However this relationship also contains potential tensions arising from differences in communication styles, decision-making approaches, and problem-solving methods. The more alternatives available, the greater the opportunity for decisions to occur (Margareta & Darmawan, 2025). Japanese managers accustomed to indirect communication and consensus-based decision-making may feel frustrated when dealing with local workers desiring clear, direct instructions. Conversely, local workers

may perceive Japanese managers as difficult to understand and excessively slow in decision-making (Law *et al.*, 2022). These minor tensions, if not properly managed, can disrupt production process smoothness and ultimately affect product quality. High cross-cultural awareness is required from both parties to bridge these differences, thereby creating synergy that leverages each other's strengths without mutual undermining.

Over the long term, workers continuously operating under the shadow of foreign standards may experience what can be termed a professional identity crisis (Tran *et al.*, 2022). They may feel that the work they perform does not fully reflect themselves but rather constitutes merely an imposed role. This crisis can trigger various responses, ranging from intense efforts to prove oneself, apathy and withdrawal, to active resistance against company values. The most constructive response occurs when workers successfully achieve appropriation, namely taking ownership of those foreign values and making them their own in an authentic manner (Shibata, 2008). This appropriation process requires environmental support, particularly from direct supervisors and peers, providing space for workers to experiment and discover their own ways of expressing those values. When appropriation succeeds, workers no longer feel alienated but rather feel proud of mastering high standards and incorporating them into their new professional identity.

The influence of the country-of-origin effect on worker performance is also substantially determined by the extent to which companies provide adequate understanding of the rationale behind every standard and procedure implemented (Oki, 2020). If standards are merely conveyed as commands to be followed without explanation, workers will tend to comply mechanically without understanding. However if companies take time to explain the philosophy behind each standard, how that standard

was developed, and why that standard matters for product quality, workers will possess more comprehensive understanding (Mizobata *et al.*, 2021). This understanding enables them to make appropriate decisions when facing situations not precisely aligned with standards. Individual decisions are often influenced by considerations of benefits and risks (Hidayat & Darmawan, 2025). They no longer merely follow instruction manuals but are capable of thinking creatively within the corridor of values they have comprehended. This capability is critically important in the complex electronics industry, where variations in production conditions cannot possibly be fully anticipated in standard procedures. Workers who understand the philosophy behind standards become reliable problem solvers, not merely robots following instructions.

Work group dynamics are also significantly influenced by the country-of-origin effect (Peterson *et al.*, 1999). Within teams comprising diverse individuals with varying levels of acceptance toward Japanese values, unique subcultures often emerge. Some groups may be highly enthusiastic about adopting these values, others moderate, and still others resistant. Interactions among these groups shape informal norms that may align with or even contradict formal company norms. Informal norms formed at the group level often exert stronger influence on daily behavior compared to formal management policies. A new worker will more quickly adapt to the work methods of their team colleagues than to company manuals (Lam, 1995). Therefore, efforts to build strong professional identity must reach this group level. Management needs to understand dynamics occurring within each team and seek ways to strengthen positive norms supporting quality while correcting negative norms that could undermine it.

The experience of working at a premium Japanese electronics company often becomes a source of distinct pride for workers, particularly in areas where

high-standard employment opportunities are limited. Pleasant experiences can enhance loyalty (Auliyah & Darmawan, 2025). This pride emerges from awareness that they work for a brand recognized worldwide, and that the products they produce are used by people across various countries. This pride, if properly managed, can become an extremely powerful source of motivation. Workers proud of their company will strive harder to maintain the company's good name. They will feel ashamed if a defective product originating from their hands reaches consumers. This pride also drives them to continuously learn and improve skills in order to contribute more substantially. However pride unaccompanied by adequate understanding can transform into counterproductive arrogance (Tsunoi *et al.*, 2010). Excessively proud workers may become resistant to criticism and improvement suggestions, believing their methods are already most correct because they come from a large company. Balance between pride and humility for continuous learning becomes key in maintaining quality performance.

In premium electronics production processes, workers are often confronted with situations where they must choose between meeting quantity targets or maintaining quality. Pressure to achieve production targets can become extremely intense, particularly approaching delivery deadlines (Matsuo, 2016). The country-of-origin effect attached to the brand should serve as a reminder that sacrificing quality for quantity constitutes an extremely dangerous act for long-term reputation. Yet in practice, the temptation to take shortcuts often proves difficult to resist. Herein lies the crucial role of strong professional identity. Workers possessing robust professional identity, who view themselves as quality guardians rather than merely task executors, will be better able to withstand pressure to compromise on quality. They possess internal boundaries they are unwilling to violate, because violating those boundaries

would mean betraying their own identity (Earley & Erez, 1997). This strong professional identity does not form automatically but rather is built through long processes of development, role modeling, and positive reinforcement from the environment.

Workers operating within environments saturated with the country-of-origin effect also develop particular perspectives regarding consumers (Fukuzawa *et al.*, 2018). They recognize that consumers purchasing their products are individuals possessing high expectations and willingness to pay premium prices for the best quality. Payment convenience constitutes an important factor in consumer decisions (Rahayu & Darmawan, 2025). This awareness creates a psychological connection between workers and consumers, despite never meeting directly. Workers imagine the faces of consumers who will use their products, and imagine the satisfaction or disappointment those consumers will experience. This imagination serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of every detail in the production process (Tesalonika & Susilowati, 2023). A worker who imagines a professional photographer relying on the camera they assembled to capture irreplaceable moments will work with significantly higher levels of meticulousness compared to someone who merely views themselves as assembling inanimate objects devoid of meaning. Building this consumer awareness constitutes one of the most effective ways to internalize high quality standards within workers.

The professional identity formation process never ceases at a single point but rather continues developing alongside increasing experience and personal maturity. Positive experiences can strengthen the desire to continue using services (Fahriza & Darmawan, 2025). Workers who have spent years at premium Japanese electronics companies will pass through various phases in their relationship with the country-of-origin effect. In the initial phase, they may feel

awkward and burdened by unfamiliar high standards. Entering the next phase, they begin understanding and accepting these standards as part of professional demands. In a more mature phase, they not only accept but also take pride in being part of this tradition of excellence (Kalicharan, 2014). Finally, in the most mature phase, they are capable of transforming these values into practical wisdom that can be taught to subsequent generations. Understanding these developmental phases is important for management in designing development programs appropriate to worker maturity levels. A uniform approach for everyone across all phases will prove ineffective, because the needs and challenges faced in each phase differ qualitatively.

The country-of-origin effect is not merely an external variable influencing consumer perceptions but rather a force that directly shapes the psychological reality of production line workers (Hanna & Chasanah, 2024). The Made in Japan label carries with it a set of expectations, values, and standards that must be navigated by every individual involved in the production process. This navigation process shapes their professional identity in complex ways, sometimes empowering, sometimes burdening, depending on how the company manages these dynamics. The success of premium Japanese electronics companies in maintaining their quality reputation is determined not only by technological sophistication or procedural precision but also by their ability to create environments where workers can develop strong and authentic professional identities. Digital transformation drives organizations to adapt (Mardikaningsih & Werdoyo, 2024). This professional identity ultimately becomes the foundation for long-term performance consistency, because when an individual has internalized quality standards as part of their identity, they will maintain them under any circumstances, even when no one is watching.

This study enriches understanding of the psychological mechanisms connecting quality philosophy with individual performance, demonstrating that Kaizen effectiveness is substantially determined by the extent to which its values are internalized within workers, not merely implemented as formal procedures. Second, this study expands perspectives on the country-of-origin effect by demonstrating that this phenomenon is relevant not only in the realm of marketing and consumer behavior but also has significant impacts on internal organizational dynamics, particularly in the formation of worker professional identity. For industry practitioners, the practical implications include the necessity of designing corporate culture development programs that touch the affective and spiritual aspects of workers, not merely cognitive aspects and technical skills. Kaizen training programs need to be redesigned to provide space for workers to personally interpret these values, so that compliance with standards emerges from internal conviction rather than external pressure. Management also needs to be more sensitive to the psychological dynamics generated by the country-of-origin effect, by creating cross-cultural dialogue enabling workers to harmoniously integrate global standards with local wisdom.

## CONCLUSION

This literature review demonstrates that internalization of Kaizen values within human resources constitutes the primary foundation for achieving performance consistency in the premium electronics industry. This internalization process unfolds through transformation of individual consciousness, wherein continuous improvement is no longer understood as a series of technical procedures but rather as a way of life embedded in daily work. Performance consistency emerges from personal discipline, employee empowerment, habituation of systematic thinking through the PDCA cycle, and

strengthening of intrinsic motivation causing workers to feel ownership and pride in the products they produce. Simultaneously, the country-of-origin effect attached to Japanese electronics brands creates a complex psychological landscape for workers. The Made in Japan label carries expectations of high standards that must be navigated by every individual, influencing their professional identity formation through continuous negotiation between imported values and local values. The company's success in maintaining its quality reputation depends on its ability to create environments where workers can develop strong and authentic professional identities, so that they work not out of compulsion but rather from conviction that quality reflects their own identity.

Future research can extend this investigation by conducting empirical studies at Japanese electronics factories operating in various countries to examine the extent to which the Kaizen internalization process and professional identity dynamics outlined in this review actually occur in real practice. Phenomenological approaches employing in-depth interviews with production line workers are highly recommended to capture the richness of their subjective experiences in negotiating Japanese standard demands with their respective cultural backgrounds. Comparative research across countries would also prove valuable for understanding how local cultural factors moderate the internalization process of Kaizen values and professional identity formation. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the development of worker professional identity over time could provide insight into the phases individuals pass through in adopting foreign values as part of their identity. For companies, it is recommended to conduct periodic cultural audits that measure not only procedural compliance but also assess the depth of quality value internalization within employees. Such

audits can serve as foundations for designing more precisely targeted interventions in building human

resources capable of maintaining premium product consistency amidst various industry challenges.

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