RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES / MASTER'S & PhD

Why do people continue to improve?

KAIZEN · EMPLOYEE PSYCHOLOGY · INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT

THREE QUESTIONS / ONE RESEARCH PROGRAM

01	02	03
WHY DOES IT START?	WHY DOES IT LAST?	WHY DOES IT DIFFER?
Anxiety & urgency	Kaizen & flow	Managers & HRM

KODO YOKOZAWA | PROFESSOR



Kodo Yokozawa is a Professor of Management at Yokohama National University, Japan. He holds a PhD from the University of Twente, the Netherlands. His research focuses on continuous improvement (Kaizen), its international transfer, and the psychological mechanisms underlying improvement behaviors. He received the Best Research Award from Yokohama National University in 2023.

LinkedIn · Kodo Yokozawa | Official faculty profile

WORKING IN THE LAB

Seminars are normally conducted in English. Master's theses are strongly encouraged in English; doctoral dissertations are generally written in English. We welcome rigorous quantitative and qualitative work.

FIVE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Prospective master's and PhD students are encouraged to develop their research proposals within the following five research directions, which reflect the lab's ongoing research and future priorities. These topics are not exhaustive, and applicants are welcome to propose their own research ideas, provided they are closely aligned with the lab's core research interests.

01 — 03

Research directions

01 Anxiety and kaizen: when does anxiety help or hinder improvement?

MASTER'S / PHD

Our prior studies link trait anxiety with standard-following and proactive behaviour. We seek to understand when anxiety motivates improvement and when it may inhibit action, without assuming that one pattern holds for everyone.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How is anxiety related to kaizen behaviour, performance and sustained improvement?
- Under what personal or workplace conditions does anxiety support, rather than impede, kaizen?

READ Yokozawa (2024), "Anxiety that drives kaizen" — chapter; request a copy.

READ Yokozawa et al., "From trait anxiety to flow", JMTM.

02 Developing a sense of urgency

MASTER'S / PHD

Recognising the need for change may prompt kaizen and innovation. We examine how a sense of urgency emerges and how it shapes employee behaviour across organisational settings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do employees develop a sense of urgency about problems and the need for change?
- When and how does urgency influence kaizen, innovative behaviour and other work outcomes?

READ Nguyen et al. (2022), Sense of Urgency, AOM Proceedings.

03 How managers develop internal sensitivity

MASTER'S / PHD

Internal sensitivity concerns managers' ability to notice subtle changes in people and work processes. Field experience, interest in employees and familiarity with normal conditions offer potential starting points for research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How is managerial internal sensitivity developed and expressed in everyday management?
- How does internal sensitivity influence managerial responses and employee or organisational outcomes?

READ Phung & Yokozawa (2026), "From Genba Walks to Organizational Insights" — chapter; request a copy.

Research directions

04 How does kaizen become self-sustaining?

MASTER'S / PHD

Kaizen may begin through formal systems, managerial direction or anxiety. We explore how participation can become meaningful and self-directed over time, drawing on flow and self-determination theory without presuming a single path.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do initially externally prompted kaizen activities become autonomous and sustained?
- What roles might flow, changes in motivation and workplace conditions play in that process?

READ Yokozawa et al., "From trait anxiety to flow", JMTM.

READ Gagné & Deci (2005), Self-determination theory and work motivation.

READ Bakker (2008), The work-related flow inventory.

05 Psychological differences, HRM fit and international kaizen transfer

PHD-FOCUSED / MASTER'S PROJECTS POSSIBLE IN PART

The same kaizen programme can produce different outcomes across countries and organisations. This project explores whether employee psychology and management practices help explain variations in adoption and sustained improvement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do differences in employees' psychological tendencies shape the adoption and continuation of kaizen across settings?
- How do HRM practices interact with those tendencies, and what does this reveal about international transfer?

READ Yokozawa (2024), "Anxiety that drives kaizen" — chapter; request a copy.

READ Yokozawa & Steenhuis (2013), International kaizen transfer.

PROPOSE YOUR OWN QUESTION

The five themes are priorities, not an exclusive list. Other projects are welcome when closely connected to the group's principal research areas. We prioritize an original question and a feasible empirical design.

PEOPLE / RESEARCH / SUPERVISION

Researchers & doctoral community

CURRENT PHD RESEARCHERS



Huong Thi Xuan Phung

PhD | MANAGERIAL INTERNAL SENSITIVITY

Studies how managers recognize subtle changes in employees and workplace conditions. Research includes genba experience and managerial sensing.



Adritho Zaifar

PhD | NARRATIVE IDENTITY & MIGRANT WORK

Examines narrative identity and experiences of Indonesian technical intern trainees in Japan, using qualitative research.



David Suissa

PhD | SHARED MENTAL MODELS IN SCs

Researches shared mental models in supply chains.

DOCTORAL-TRACK RESEARCH STUDENT



Vu Viet Ha

RESEARCH STUDENT | GROUP / TEAM FLOW

Investigates group/team flow as a basis for future doctoral research.

DOCTORAL ALUMNI

Pham Thi Xuan Thoa · 2022

“Factors influencing individual opportunism in business-to-business exchange: Empirical research in Japanese manufacturing companies”
Currently working at FPT university, Vietnam.

Nguyen Anh Hao · 2023

“Antecedents and impact of a sense of urgency on employees’ behavior and performance: Empirical research in Japanese manufacturing companies”
Currently working at Waseda University, Japan.

YOKOZAWA RESEARCH LAB / STUDENT RESEARCH

Master's thesis projects

2020

Fang Wenju · Japanese

An Empirical Study on the Factors Affecting Individual Kaizen Behavior and Performance in Chinese SMEs

Lee Xiang · English

The Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Kaizen Behaviors: Empirical Evidence from Chinese Manufacturing

2021

Li Hua · Japanese

The Relationship Between Job Anxiety and Kaizen Performance: The Mediating Role of Cross-Functional Communication

Yokohama Business Society – Outstanding Thesis Award

Liu Yifu · English

Development of Learning Anxiety and Survival Anxiety Scale

Huang Jialei · Japanese

The Relationship Between Job Anxiety and the Outcomes of Kaizen Activities: The Moderating Effects of Information Disclosure and Goal Setting

2022

Wu XiaoFan · English

Impact of the Sense of Urgency Gap Between CEO and Employees on Conflicts and Employees' Work Engagement

Yokohama Business Society – Outstanding Thesis Award



2023

He Zixin · English

The Moderating Role of Middle Management Between Work Environment and Employee Belongingness in Professional Organizations: A Study on Nurses in Hospitals

Yokohama Business Society – Outstanding Thesis Award

Dong Wenxuan · English

Impact of Rumination by Perceived-Stress on Work-Related Creativity: Goal Commitment, Mentoring Functions and Mindfulness as Moderators

Yokohama Business Society – Honorable Mention

Phantharath Latthida · English

The Moderating Effect of Leader Roles and Employee Goal Commitment in the Relationship Between Fear of Failure and Innovative Behavior: Empirical Evidence from Japanese Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

The Interfaculty Graduate School of Innovative and Practical Studies – Best Presentation Award

2024

Kei Nozawa · Japanese

The Impact of a Sense of Crisis Cultivated by the Recognition of Clear Threats on Ambidextrous Management: The Moderating Effects of Organizational Commitment and Job Goal Specificity

Liu Jiarui · English

The Impact of Perceived Subordinates' Turnover on Supervisors' Knowledge Hiding, with Sense of Power and Negative Emotions as Mediators

Ke Yihui · English

The Impact of Subordinate Absorptive Capacity on Supervisor Knowledge Hiding: Proactive Behavior and Time Pressure as Moderators

2025

No new master's students were admitted during the supervisor's sabbatical.

2026

Four current master's students are working on their theses.

VISITING FACULTY & STUDENTS

An international research community

The group connects researchers across Europe and Asia through visiting appointments, research stays and joint projects.

VISITING DOCTORAL RESEARCHER



Caroline Ariane Dahl Wraae

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN DENMARK / DENMARK

Research visit hosted by the lab

June 2024 – July 2024

VISITING MASTER'S STUDENTS



Nienke Smit

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE / NETHERLANDS

Visiting master's student

June 2022- July 2022



Liam van der Veen

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE / NETHERLANDS

Erasmus+ visiting master's student

April 2026 – July 2026



Irene Pernice

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE / NETHERLANDS

Erasmus+ visiting master's student

May 2026 – July 2026

LinkedIn / Kodo Yokozawa | University profile

RESEARCH OUTPUT / COMPLETE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Publications

Kodo Yokozawa | Yokohama National University | Complete list supplied for the research group profile

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES / 11

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Nguyen, H. A., Yokozawa, K., and Suárez-Barraza, M. F. (2023), "A sense of urgency as a driver of individual kaizen performance: moderating role of organizational culture", The TQM Journal, Vol. 36 No. 6, pp. 1442-1459.

Barraza, M. F. S., Miguel-Dávila, J. A., and Yokozawa, K. (2023), "Revisiting the concept of 5'S: A comparative analysis study through the lens of pioneers", International Journal of Productivity and Quality Management., In press.

Pham, T. X. T., Yokozawa, K., & Nguyen, N. A. (2022). Unexplored Antecedents of Agent Opportunism in Buyer-Supplier Relationships: An Interviewed-Based Exploratory Study. Operations and Supply Chain Management: An International Journal, 15(3), 348 - 360.

Yokozawa, K., Nguyen, H. A., & Tran, T. B. H. (2021). Role of personal anxiety in individual kaizen behaviour and performance: evidence from Japan. International Journal of Operations & Production Management, Vol. 41, No.2. pp. 942-961.

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Yokozawa, K., Steenhuis, H.J., & de Bruijn, E.J. (2012). The role of Japanese expatriates when Japanese companies transfer kaizen principles to their overseas affiliates. Journal of Strategic Management Studies, Vol.3, No.1 pp.35-49.

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Yokozawa, K., Steenhuis, H.J., & de Bruijn, E.J. (2011). Process of kaizen Transfer in the Netherlands. The Journal of Japanese Operations Management and Strategy, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 38-57.

Yokozawa, K., Steenhuis, H.J., & de Bruijn, E.J. (2010). Recent Experience with Transferring Japanese Management Systems Abroad. Journal of Strategic Management Studies, Vol. 2, No.1, pp. 1-15.

BOOK CHAPTERS / 03

Phung, H. T. X., and Yokozawa, K. (2025), "From Genba Walks to Organizational Insights: Unveiling the Concept of Internal Sensitivity", In R. Sakamoto (Ed.), Handbook of Japanese Labor Practices: Changing Perceptions, Amsterdam University Press, Tokyo.

Yokozawa, K. (2024), "Anxiety that drives kaizen: a strategic blueprint for kaizen implementation across borders", In A. Furlan and D. Powell (Eds.), A Research Agenda for Lean Management, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, pp. 197-214. Book received Shingo Award 2025.

Fukuzawa, M., Inamizu, N., Shintaku, J., Yokozawa, K., & Suzuki, N. (2018). The Nature of Surviving Japanese Factories in the Global Competition: An Empirical Analysis of Electrical and Electronics Factories. In T. Fujimoto & F. Ikuine (Eds.), Industrial Competitiveness and Design Evolution (Vol. 12, pp. 223-247): Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-4-431-55145-4_7

CONFERENCE PAPERS & PROCEEDINGS / 28

Hang, D. M., Nguyen, H. A., Yokozawa, K., and Anh, M. (2025). An empirical study in Vietnam on trait mindfulness and work performance: The mediating role of cognitive reappraisal Contemporary Issues in Economics, Management and Business (CIEMB), Hanoi Vietnam.

Ho, T. T., Nguyen, H. A., Yokozawa, K., and Tran, P. H. (2025). An Empirical Study on Effect of Work from Home on Work-Family Spillover and Job Performance in Vietnam: Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence. Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Research in Management and Technovation, Singapore.

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