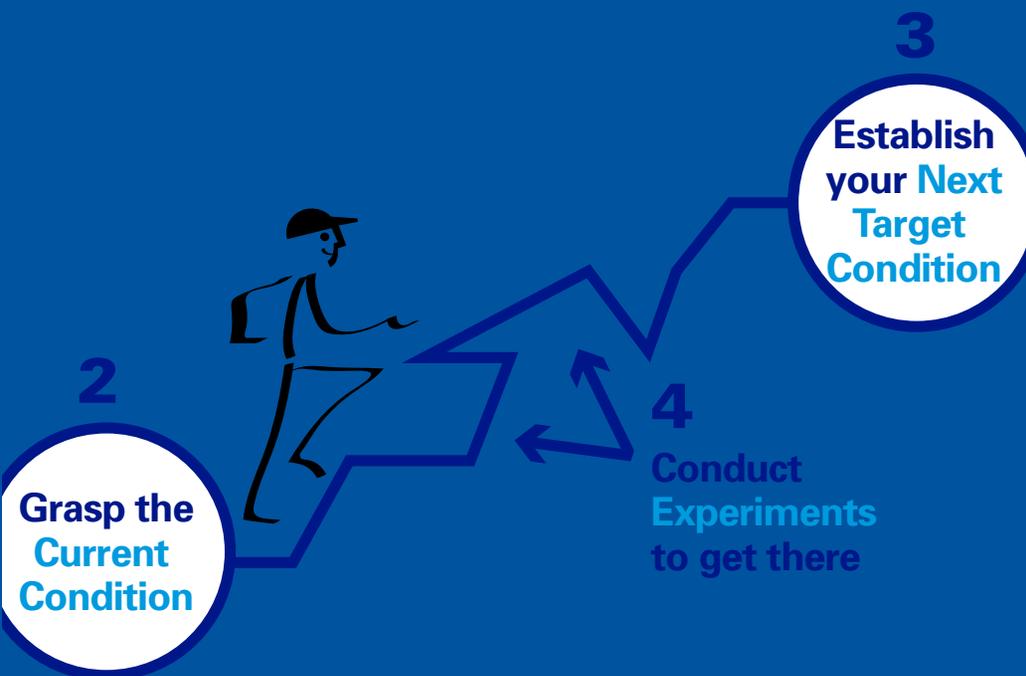


What are the Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata?

An Introduction by Beth Carrington



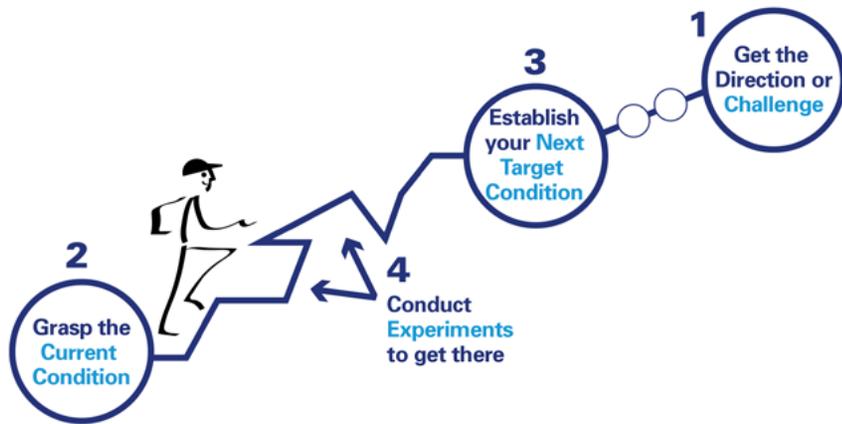
Kata

A routine that you repeatedly practice, so it becomes a habit, creating a new behavior pattern. The term “kata” comes from the field of martial arts. In lean management, kata refers to two linked behaviors: Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata.

Intentionally practicing the **Improvement Kata**, a repeating four-step routine by which individuals improve and adapt their work, will create a new default way of working. Through this practice, individuals make a habit of using the scientific problem-solving method of plan, do, check, act (PDCA) when faced with a problem or striving to improve their work processes.

The **Coaching Kata** is a framework, a series of questions, used by lean leaders to provoke and reinforce the effective practice of the Improvement Kata. The coaching practice occurs in the gemba, where the work is done, in service to teaching those who do the work how to achieve new levels of performance, innovation, and adaptiveness through the scientific problem-solving method of PDCA.

The Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata were introduced to the lean community by Mike Rother in 2010 in his book *Toyota Kata*. In 2021, Dr. Jeffery Liker highlighted the practices in *The Toyota Way, 2nd Edition*, crediting the use of the two kata as an effective way to develop the scientific problem-solving method of PDCA and embed it in an organization’s work processes.



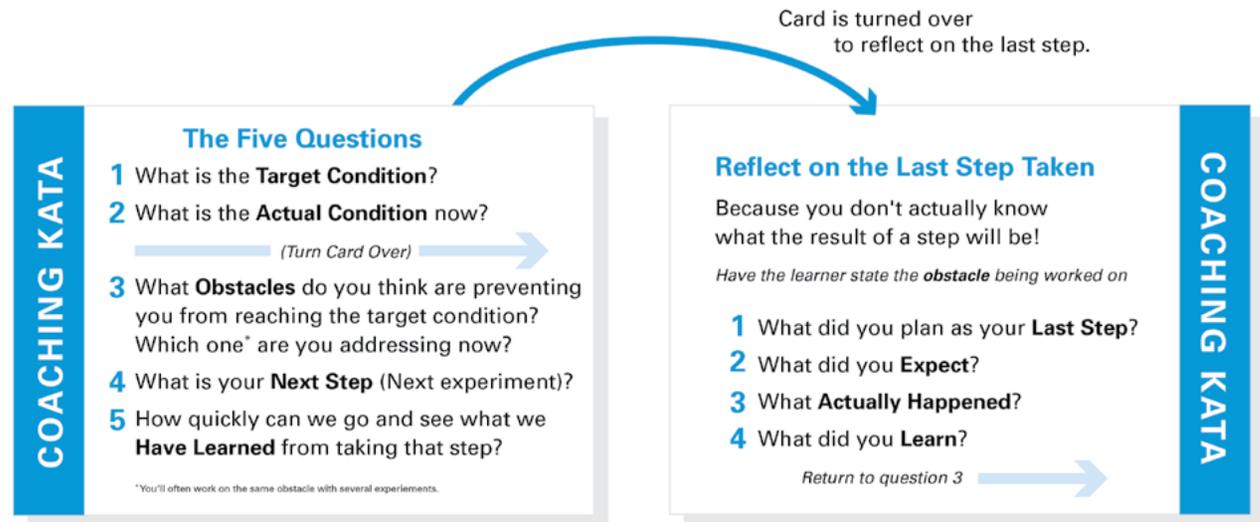
Improvement Kata

The four steps in the Improvement Kata that a process owner, aka the learner, practices are as follows:

1. Create a Challenge (goal or objective) in your work that, if you achieve, will help move the organization toward its Vision.
2. Grasp your work process' current condition as it relates to your Challenge by collecting facts and data.
3. Set a Target Condition to achieve in two weeks that moves you toward meeting your Challenge.
4. Conduct experiments to learn how to overcome obstacles in the way of achieving the Target Condition.

Coaching Kata

The five questions of the Coaching Kata, asked of the learner by a coach, guide the learner through the desired scientific PDCA thought pattern. During the coaching session, the teacher or coach also gives the learner procedural guidance—not solutions—that help the learner successfully overcome obstacles.



Faculty Highlight

Beth Carrington

President and Master Coach
Carrington Consulting



KATA Matters

Beth is an Improvement Kata/Coaching Kata instructor and program developer at Lean Enterprise Institute and other global organizations such as the University and Michigan.

Since 1999, she has led organizations in lean transformations, helping a wide range of clients, including small and large, repetitive and custom processors in the manufacturing, healthcare, service, and government sectors.

Before becoming a consultant, Beth accumulated over 20 years of experience in leadership within the personal care, furniture, and automotive industries.

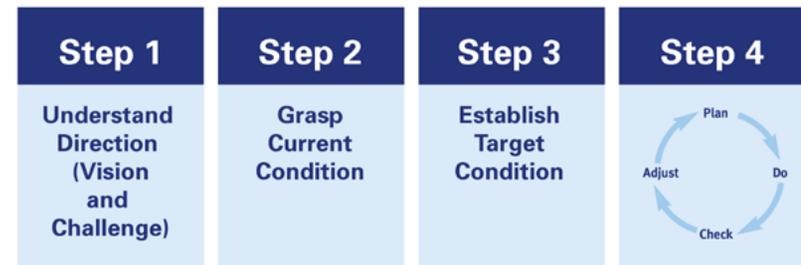
She has worked with organizations deploying the Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata since 2008.

Improvement Kata is a routine deliberately practiced to develop scientific thinking skills while working toward achieving a Challenge.

Like many concepts, graphic models are used to convey the routine's sub-routines. Here are three other models typically used to depict the Improvement Kata, each with its strengths (+) and limitations (-).

Let's take a look!

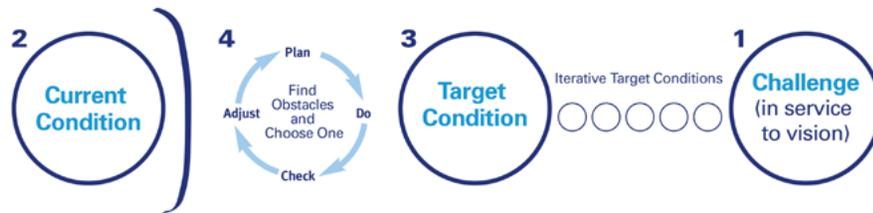
Model 1



Model 1 illustrates the four sub-routines of the Improvement Kata as a series of discrete steps.

- + Simplicity. It depicts the practice pattern from the start of a learner's journey, highlighting the need to grasp the current condition before setting the target condition.
- By conveying the sub-routines as a series of discrete steps, it fails to show that, in reality, one sub-routine influences prior ones and the next one as the learner's Knowledge Threshold changes with each learning step.

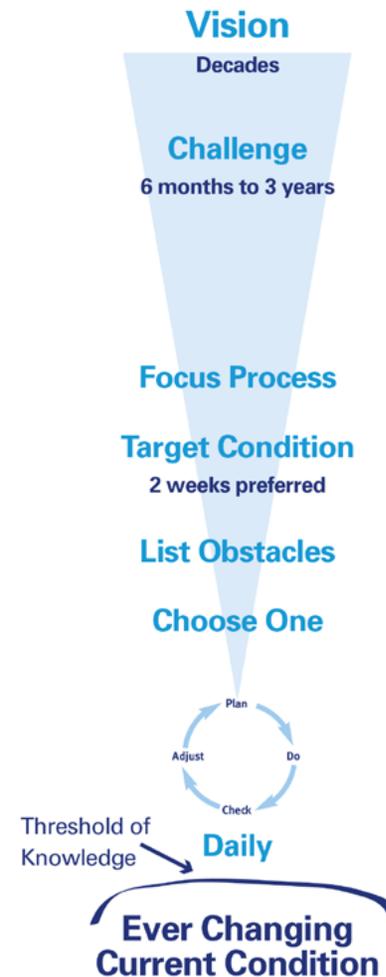
Model 2



Model 2 depicts the four sub-routines in chronological order, not as a series of steps.

- + Accurately shows obstacles, PDCA, and target conditions aligned between the Current Condition and the Challenge, or what the learner is striving to achieve.
- + Correctly positions the Knowledge Threshold at the Current Condition, showing that the journey's goal is to learn how to achieve desired outcomes, not the implementation of "tools."
- Suggests that the Current Condition is static when, in reality, it is ever-changing based on learner's experimentation and other influences.

Model 3



Model 3 uses a funnel to illustrate that the routine's goal is to achieve a long-term vision through daily PDCA.

- + Illustrates that the Current Condition is not static but rather constantly changing.
- + Puts the Threshold of Knowledge at the Current Condition, showing that the journey's goal is to learn how to achieve desired outcomes.
- + Effectively portrays the overall timeline from the learners' daily PDCA to achieve a Target Condition in two weeks, helping them progress toward the Challenge in six months to two years and ultimately enabling the organization to fulfill its vision decades in the future.
- + Shows how the pinpoint focus on daily PDCA at the gemba aligns with the organization's vision.
- Complexity.



About The Lean Enterprise Institute

The Lean Enterprise Institute, Inc., was founded in 1997 by management expert James P. Womack, Ph.D., as a nonprofit research, education, publishing, and conferencing company. As part of its mission to advance lean thinking around the world, LEI supports the Lean Global Network (leanglobal.org), the Lean Education Academic Network (teachinglean.org), and the Healthcare Value Network (healthcarevalueleaders.org).

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