

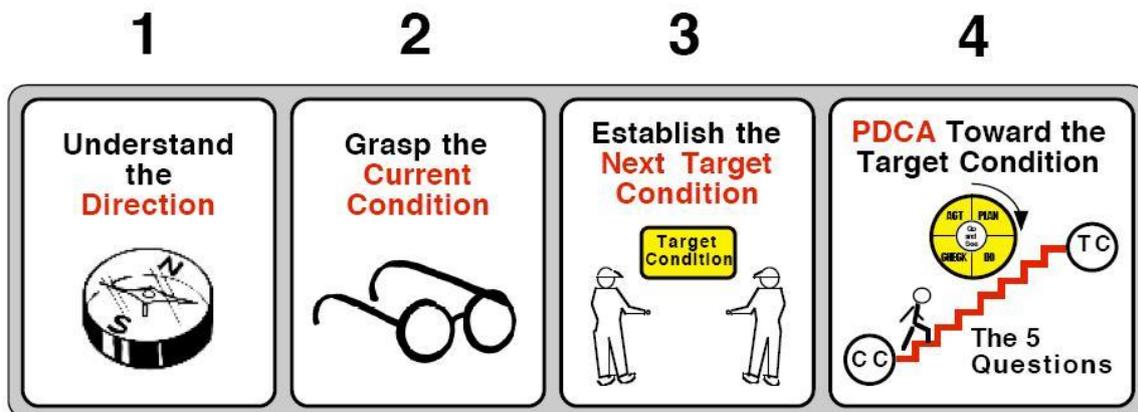
# Solution Focused Lean Improvement Kata

By David Shaked

A few days ago, during a Solution-Focus Open Space conversation, I was reminded of the Toyota Kata improvement process. We were talking about it in the context of how to create the best conditions for a group to experience the 'flow' state as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, while working on a Lean process-improvement activity.

In positive psychology, flow, also known as 'the zone', is the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one is doing. While we can't necessarily create the state of flow, we can certainly influence the conditions we work in to enable this productive state of mind. Flow is achieved when we are able to create a fine balance between the level of a challenge we're facing and the skills we have and can use.

In his Toyota Kata book (McGraw-Hill Education, 2009) Mike Rother describes the Kata process of improvement using the following process and diagram:



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The Toyota Kata is a way of thinking and acting that improvement teams can practice to meet their process-improvement challenges. The process goes as follows:

- 1) Understand the direction – Clarify the targets we want to achieve.
- 2) Grasp the current condition – What the current level of performance is + analysing what prevents us from achieving the goal.
- 3) Establishing the next target – Establish an improved level of performance that is better than the current level and would help us move in the desired direction.
- 4) Moving towards the next target level through experimentation. This is done using PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycles.

While this process is well known, practised and widely documented, a strengths-based approach can actually build on this process and improve it further. Three years ago, Nicolas Stamps (@Nicolasstampf) and I co-developed such a strengths-based approach to Kata. For example, when we take the great tools from Solution Focus coaching and apply them to this process, we can enhance the level of creativity and the energy to change. The Solution Focus version of Kata would work like this:

Kata Step	Relevant Lean and SF Tools	Sample process and questions we can use*
Understand the Direction	'Platform' and 'Future Perfect'	<p>Who are the customers for what we produce? What would they like? What else?</p> <p>What would be the benefit to them, to us and to this organisation from achieving what is wanted?</p> <p>Suppose we have been miraculously transported into the future to a point where we can notice very obvious signs that our desired outcome has been achieved... what would be different then? What else would be different? How would we notice? (Describe in detail.)</p>
Grasp the current condition	Scale + Gemba + Counters + affirmations	<p>1) Ask members of the team to rate the current situations in comparison to the desired state using a rating of between 1 and 10 (10 being we've achieved what we hoped for). Ask each member to elaborate on their rating by mentioning what is already working well and gave them the confidence to give that rating.</p> <p>2) Send the team members out for a Gemba walk of the current process, asking them to specifically notice the strongest parts of the process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is going well</li> <li>- What resources exist?</li> <li>- Where do clues of the desired future already show up?</li> <li>- When have we achieved the best outcomes? How?</li> <li>- Who seems to be performing better? How?</li> </ul> <p>3) When the team members come back from their Gemba walk, ask them to affirm what they have been most impressed by.</p>
Establish the next target condition	Next step on the scale	Refer back to the rating on the scale you completed earlier and ask the team members what could be the next step on that scale that would move us in the direction of the desired

		future. Follow this by asking what would be different/better and how would it be noticed?
Move towards the target	Small steps + Experimentation + Notice what's better	Get the team members to pair up and ask each other what small steps could each member carry on in moving to the desired future. Ask them to keep reducing these steps further to the easiest/smallest steps they can possibly come up with.  Then allow some time (as needed) for the team members to experiment with these small steps  Regroup and ask the team members: What do we notice that is already better? How was it achieved?

If an 'obstacle' appears (as mentioned in the classic Kata) - perhaps a useful way to approach it is to understand if this obstacle is present across the board and at all times; if not, what makes the exceptions possible? We can also check who is already able to overcome the obstacle, and how they are doing it.

Going back to where I started in trying to understand how to create the conditions for a state of flow for an improvement team, this solution-focus version of a Kata can certainly create great conditions for the team members to flow together and achieve a good impact. It provides a good balance between the need to be challenged and the level of skills the team members have. It also helps the team discover new skills and strengths they probably weren't aware of, and thus be able to handle a higher level of challenge in the future.

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David enables clients to think differently and unlock possibilities – no matter how difficult a situation may seem. He does this through flexible, creative and practical use of strengths-based approaches to change facilitation/enablement. He can be reached at: [david@almond-insight.com](mailto:david@almond-insight.com).