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Appendix: Forms for Practicing
By Mike Rother
Improvement Kata Handbook
Practicing foundational skills for scientific thinking
v 3.2.0
ABOUT THIS
PROTOTYPE VERSION OF THE
IMPROVEMENT KATA HANDBOOK

While we develop and test the contents of the Improvement Kata Handbook, it’s beta version will be available online. Use the Handbook to help you apply, teach and internalize the scientific patterns of the Improvement Kata and the Coaching Kata, through practice.

This beta version is provided for sharing things we’re learning... to accelerate our collective learning about deliberate practice of structured routines as a means of developing the skills and habits of scientific thinking in any organization.

The beta version is updated periodically. Check the version number on the cover.

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These materials are intended to support persons who are teaching, practicing or interested in the Improvement Kata & Coaching Kata.

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A Note to All Users of this Handbook

**Kata** are structured routines that you practice deliberately, especially at the beginning, so their pattern becomes a habit and leaves you with new abilities. Kata are a way of learning fundamental skills that you can build on. The word comes from the martial arts, where Kata are used to train combatants in fundamental moves. But the idea of a Kata can be applied in a much broader sense. The Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata are for training managers and leaders in a new way of doing their jobs.

At first you should try to practice each Kata exactly as described, until its pattern becomes somewhat automatic and habitual for you. That can take several months of practice. When you reach that point and have learned through practice to understand the "why" behind that Kata's routine, then you can start to deviate from it by evolving your own version or style of the pattern... as long as its core principles remain intact.

**Practice Kata to Find Your Way.** My goal with this Handbook is not to show you precisely how your management system should look and function. That would be impossible since each organization has unique characteristics and exists in unique conditions. Developing an organization's managerial system is not about copying the tools and techniques that another organization has come up with, which would be *jumping to solutions*. You can and should start with some already-existing basics, like in sports and music, but then it's an unavoidable iterative process of trial and adjustment. The goal of this Handbook is to show you how to start developing and building your own 21st Century management approach by practicing a set of fundamental Kata.

This Handbook utilizes a well-proven set of basic Kata to practice every day. You could call them "**Starter Kata.**" They come from the Toyota Kata research and have been used for practice at thousands of organizations around the world. Begin with the starter Kata and then, as you gain skill and understanding, add to or adjust them to fit your situation as needed. Then you’ll be developing your own way.

Best wishes for your practicing!

Mike Rother
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PREFACE
How Do You Manage for Improvement, Adaptiveness and Innovation?

- How can we best prepare an organization for the future when we don’t know what the future will bring?
- How can we get more comfortable with challenging goals and successfully navigate the unpredictable zone between here and there?
- How do you develop the skill of everyone in the organization to establish strategically-aligned goals and work toward them effectively?
- How do you sustain this?

This Handbook gives you a way to answer these questions. Use the approach and practice techniques presented here to develop skills and mindset that make your organization more capable of achieving goals and meeting challenges.
DELIBERATELY DEVELOPING A TEAM’S SKILL AND AN ORGANIZATION’S CULTURE

This Handbook is about a scientific pattern combined with routines of deliberate practice. Practicing the routines in this Handbook makes you and your team better at achieving goals and meeting challenges, and thus at improving, adapting and innovating.

Consider the following:

► The people in every organization have unconscious habits of thinking and acting. Those habits constitute the basis of the organization’s culture.

► All managers are teachers, whether consciously or not. With their everyday words and actions managers teach their people a mindset and approach, which determines the organization’s capability.

For these reasons it makes sense to ask:

--> What pattern of thought and action do we want our managers to be teaching?

--> What routines should we be practicing and reinforcing every day in our organization to make that pattern a reality?
This Handbook is about developing new skills and habits the same way that athletes and musicians do. Think of this as a handbook of dance steps for beginners to practice.

(1) The overall pattern (the dance or skill you’re trying to learn or teach) called the “Improvement Kata.” It’s a systematic, scientific way of thinking and acting that can be applied to any goal. The objective is to have everyone in your organization be able to dance this pattern smoothly and confidently, in your organization’s own style.

(2) But just knowing the pattern of a dance is not enough for being able to dance. You need to practice. So this Handbook describes structured practice routines (the dance steps) for beginners to start with so they can learn the Improvement Kata pattern.

This Handbook also describes a routine for teaching the IK pattern, called the “Coaching Kata.”
A Pattern or Model of Scientific Thinking

Making it Real Through Practice
Transforming our thinking and acting
WHAT’S IN PARTS I, II & III OF THIS HANDBOOK

The IMPROVEMENT KATA MODEL (A scientific approach)

This is the overall pattern of thinking and acting we’re trying to learn. It’s a universal pattern for achieving tough goals, which can be applied in all walks of life.

(HANDBOOK PART I)

There are PRACTICE ROUTINES for each step of the Improvement Kata. These are the Starter Kata for the Learner.

(HANDBOOK PART II)

The COACHING KATA is a practice routine for teaching the Improvement Kata pattern. It’s the Starter Kata for the Coach.

(HANDBOOK PART III)
THE IK PATTERN IS A ‘META-SKILL’

The Handbook’s instructions apply at every level in an organization.

Every Coach and Learner uses the same Handbook because everyone in the organization can utilize the same scientific pattern of thinking and acting, just as scientists do. It’s a foundational meta skill. Each level practices the same fundamental routines, although the content of what’s being worked on and, ultimately, the style differs from area to area and level to level.
WHAT THIS HANDBOOK SHOWS YOU

How to apply, practice and teach the Improvement Kata pattern so that it becomes a habit of thinking and acting

► How to use and operationalize a scientific pattern, which is a foundation of modern management.

► How to use the Improvement Kata practice routines on real processes to improve, adapt and innovate, by walking you through them step-by-step.

► How to operate a daily Coach <-- Learner teaching routine that integrates practice of the Improvement Kata pattern into daily work and, over time, into people’s mindset and a team or organization’s culture.

► How to get more comfortable with the uncertain path that’s inherent in striving for challenging goals.

► How to align team efforts and make any team successful in achieving goals and meeting challenges.

► How to sustain improvement, adaptiveness and innovation by integrating it into daily management.
WHO THIS HANDBOOK IS FOR

One user is the Learner, i.e., anyone who wants to become proficient in a scientific way of working and thinking, through practice.

The other user is the Coach, i.e., anyone who manages people. Once you’ve internalized the Improvement Kata pattern yourself, this book helps you teach the pattern to others. The goal is to embed the Improvement Kata into the daily work of managers, who are the day-to-day teachers in any organization.
Preface

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III. THE COACHING KATA
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Appendix: Forms for Practicing

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TWO PURPOSES FOR THIS HANDBOOK

1) A Practice Guide:
To as quickly and effectively as possible make you proficient enough to coach the Improvement Kata pattern, enabling you to teach and deploy it in your organization with minimal reliance on outside expertise.

2) An Application Guide:
To be a reference for how to apply the pattern of the Improvement Kata.

My goal in developing this Improvement Kata Handbook is to evolve, simplify and codify the Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata practice routines to the point that they can be used by anyone; to show that scientific thinking is a life skill that can be practiced and learned by everyone.
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I’m grateful to the following colleagues, who are fellow experimenters in working to practice and evolve the routines and guidelines in this Handbook.

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