

Improvement Kata

Handbook

Practicing foundational skills
for scientific thinking

By Mike Rother

Preface

Introduction

PART I: GETTING STARTED

The Improvement Kata Pattern

Guidelines for Practicing

Roles and Structure for Daily Practice

**PART II: PRACTICE ROUTINES FOR
THE IMPROVEMENT KATA**

Step 1: Understand the Direction / Challenge

Step 2: Grasp the Current Condition

Step 3: Establish the Next Target Condition

Step 4: Iterate Toward the Target Condition

PART III: THE COACHING KATA

Routines & Guidelines for IK Coaches

How to do a Coaching Cycle

Appendix: Forms for Practicing





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

HANDBOOK TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Introduction

PART I. GETTING STARTED

Chapter 1. The Improvement Kata Pattern

Chapter 2. Guidelines for Practicing

Chapter 3. Roles and Structure for Daily Practice

PART II. PRACTICE ROUTINES FOR THE IMPROVEMENT KATA

Chapter 4. Step 1: Understand the Direction / Challenge

Chapter 5. Step 2: Grasp the Current Condition
(The Improvement Kata Process Analysis)

Chapter 6. Step 3: Establish the Next Target Condition

Chapter 7. Step 4: Iterate Toward the Target Condition

PART III. THE COACHING KATA

Chapter 8. Routines & Guidelines for IK Coaches

Chapter 9. How to do a Coaching Cycle

Appendix: Forms for Practicing

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?

IT'S ABOUT

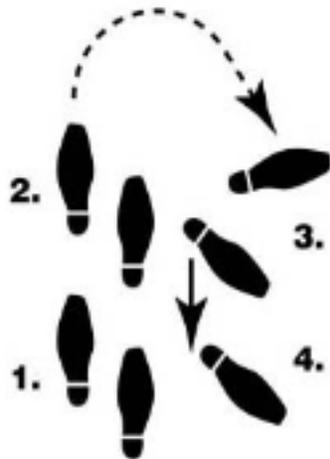
(1)
'Pattern'
a dance



(2)
'Practice Routine'
dance
steps

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.

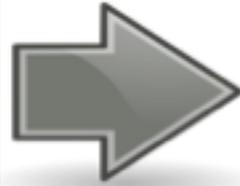
(1) The overall **pattern** (the dance or skill you're trying to learn or teach) called the "Improvement Kata." It's a systematic, scientific way of thinking and acting that can be applied to any goal. The objective is to have everyone in your organization be able to dance this pattern smoothly and confidently,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



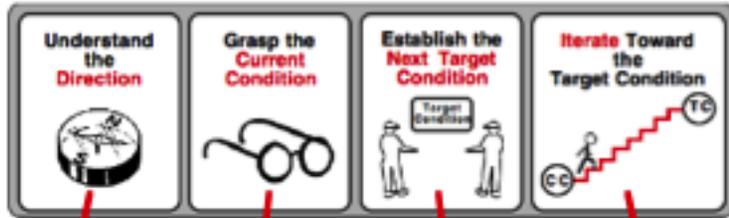
**Making it Real
Through Practice**

Four black stick figures are arranged in a row. From left to right: the first is standing with arms at its sides; the second is standing with hands on hips; the third is standing with arms raised in a 'V' shape; the fourth is standing with arms raised in a 'V' shape, similar to the third but with a slightly different posture.

**Transforming our
thinking and acting**

WHAT'S IN PARTS I, II & III OF THIS HANDBOOK

The IMPROVEMENT KATA MODEL (A scientific approach)

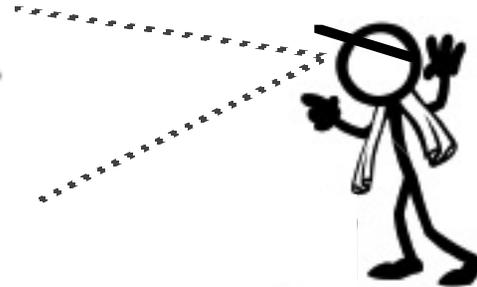


There are **PRACTICE ROUTINES** for each step of the Improvement Kata. These are the Starter Kata for the Learner.

(HANDBOOK PART II)

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)



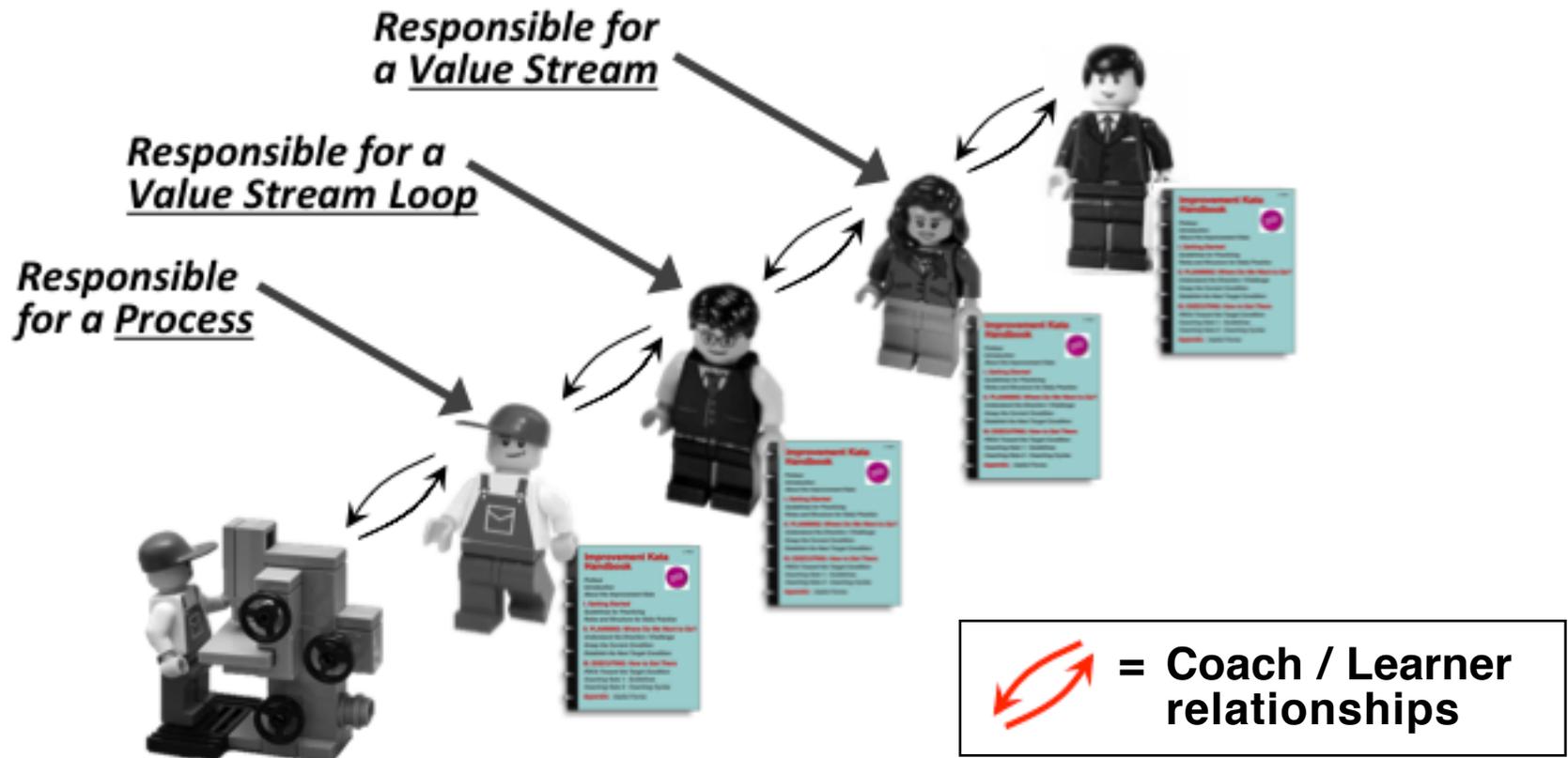
The **COACHING KATA** is a practice routine for teaching the Improvement Kata pattern. It's the Starter Kata for the Coach.

(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.



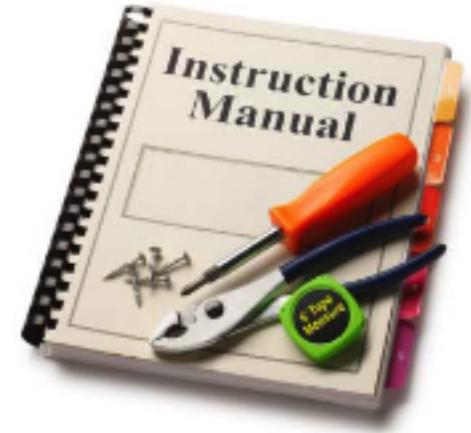
WHAT THIS HANDBOOK SHOWS YOU

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.

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Roles and Structure for Daily Practice

II. PRACTICE ROUTINES FOR THE IK

Step 1: Understand the Direction / Challenge

Step 2: Grasp the Current Condition
(The Improvement Kata Process Analysis)

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Step 4: Iterate Toward the Target Condition

III. THE COACHING KATA

Routines & Guidelines for IK Coaches
How to do a Coaching Cycle

Appendix: Forms for Practicing



The 4 Chapters on how to practice the **IMPROVEMENT KATA** speak to anyone who wants to be a **LEARNER** of the Improvement Kata pattern.

The 2 Chapters about the **COACHING KATA** speak to the **COACH** who's teaching the Improvement Kata pattern to a Learner.

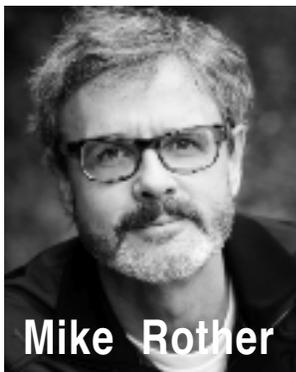
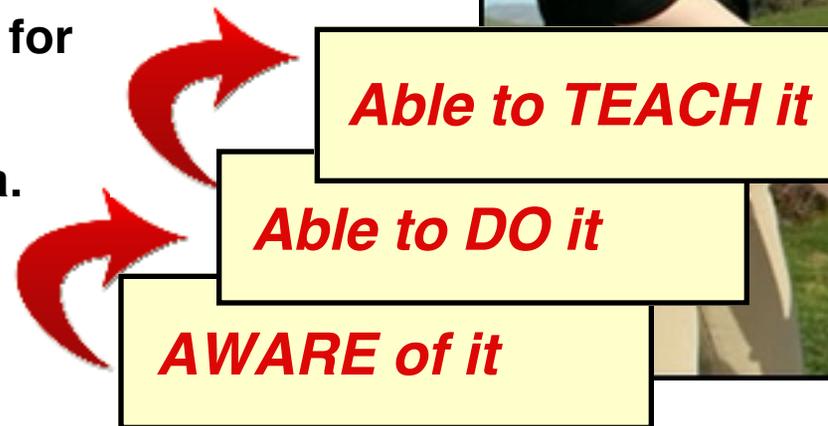
TWO PURPOSES FOR THIS HANDBOOK

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.



Mike Rother

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.

Contributors

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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