The Pattern of the Improvement Kata

by Bill Costantino and Mike Rother
There are always problems, wastes and opportunities for improvement around us. With the improvement kata you do not go on waste walks to see them, do not make pareto charts to prioritize them and do not simply go after them.
Before taking action you should understand your organization’s long-term vision for the customer.
Understand the Direction

• Vision for the customer
  • Challenge

Then, to provide a tangible objective to focus on, set a specific challenge in the direction of the vision. This challenge often comes from your future-state value stream map or company objectives.
Now take a step back and grasp the current condition in detail, following the methodical steps of the TK “Process Analysis.”
The purpose of the Process Analysis is to obtain the facts and data needed to describe the next target condition in the direction of the challenge. The target condition lies beyond your current knowledge threshold.
So Now There is a Grey Zone

Unclear territory, the “Grey Zone”

You don't know exactly how you are going to get to the target condition by its specified date.
Following the pattern of the Five Toyota Kata Questions, you conduct PDCA cycles as rapid experiments; ideally daily. From each experiment you gain new information and adjust your next step accordingly, to find your way to the target condition within the desired time frame.

You only work on obstacles you sequentially find are preventing you from reaching the target condition.
PDCA with the Five TK Questions

The Five Questions
1) What is the target condition?
2) What is the actual condition now?
3) What obstacles are now preventing you from reaching the target condition?
   Which *one* are you addressing now?  
   """(Turn Card Over)""
4) What is your next step? (next PDCA / experiment) What do you expect?
5) When can we go and see what we have learned from taking that step?

Card is turned over to reflect on the last step

Reflect on the Last Step Taken
Because you don’t actually know what the result of a step will be!

1) What was your last step?
2) What actually happened?
3) What did you learn?

"""(Turn Card Over)""
Return
That Brings You Here

- New Current State = Improved Performance
- Closer to the Challenge / Vision
- Expanded Knowledge Threshold
- Increased Skill with Improvement Kata
The pattern repeats as you strive to achieve your Next Target Condition toward the Challenge.
The Stages of the Improvement Kata

1. Understand the Direction
2. Grasp the Current Condition
3. Establish the Next Target Condition
4. PDCA Toward the Target Condition

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We wish you...

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