

# Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata Practice Guide

*Mastering foundational skills of scientific thinking  
to achieve challenging goals*

by Mike Rother





## COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

While I continue to develop and test the contents of this Practice Guide, this beta version will be available online.

**Use this Practice Guide 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.



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

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# A Note to All Users of this Practice Guide

**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 Practice Guide 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 Practice Guide is to show you how to start developing and building your own 21st Century management approach by practicing a set of fundamental Kata.

This Practice Guide 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.

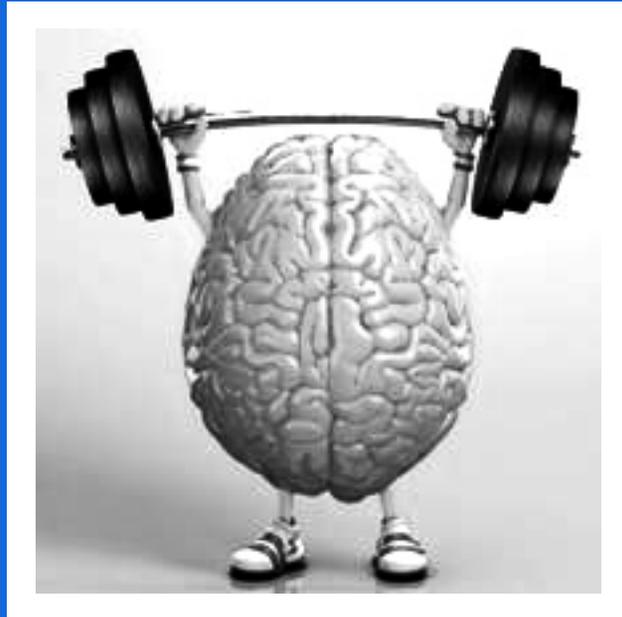
Best wishes for your practicing!

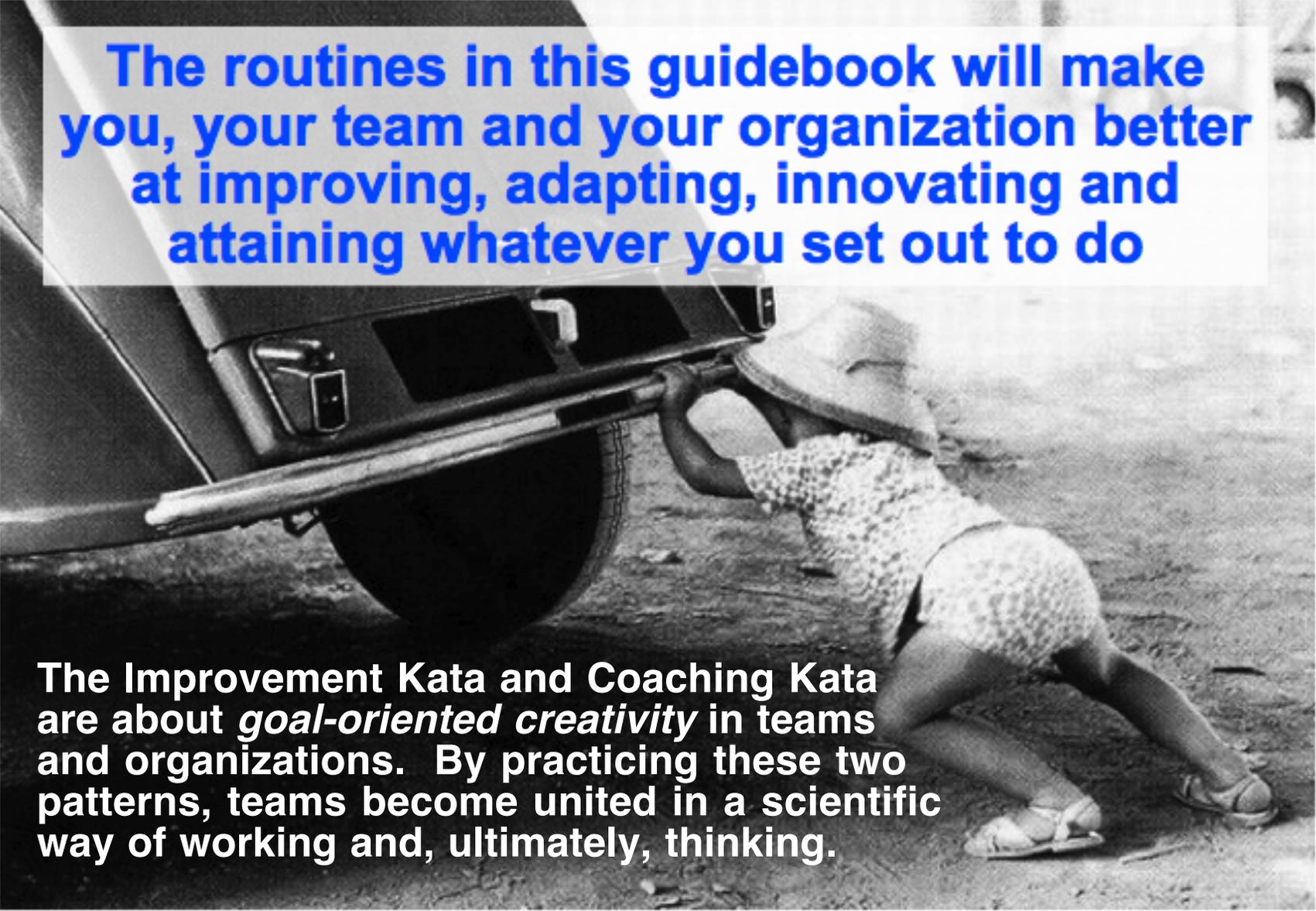
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# INTRODUCTION





**The routines in this guidebook will make you, your team and your organization better at improving, adapting, innovating and attaining whatever you set out to do**

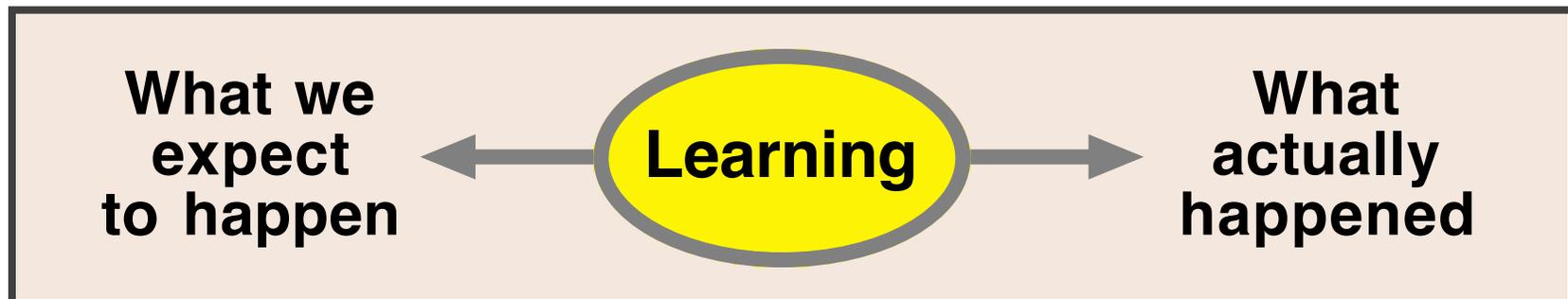
**The Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata are about *goal-oriented creativity* in teams and organizations. By practicing these two patterns, teams become united in a scientific way of working and, ultimately, thinking.**

# SCIENTIFIC THINKING TO ACHIEVE CHALLENGING GOALS

A *challenging* goal is one where we don't know in advance exactly how we will get there. There are many challenging goals in today's complex and dynamic business conditions.

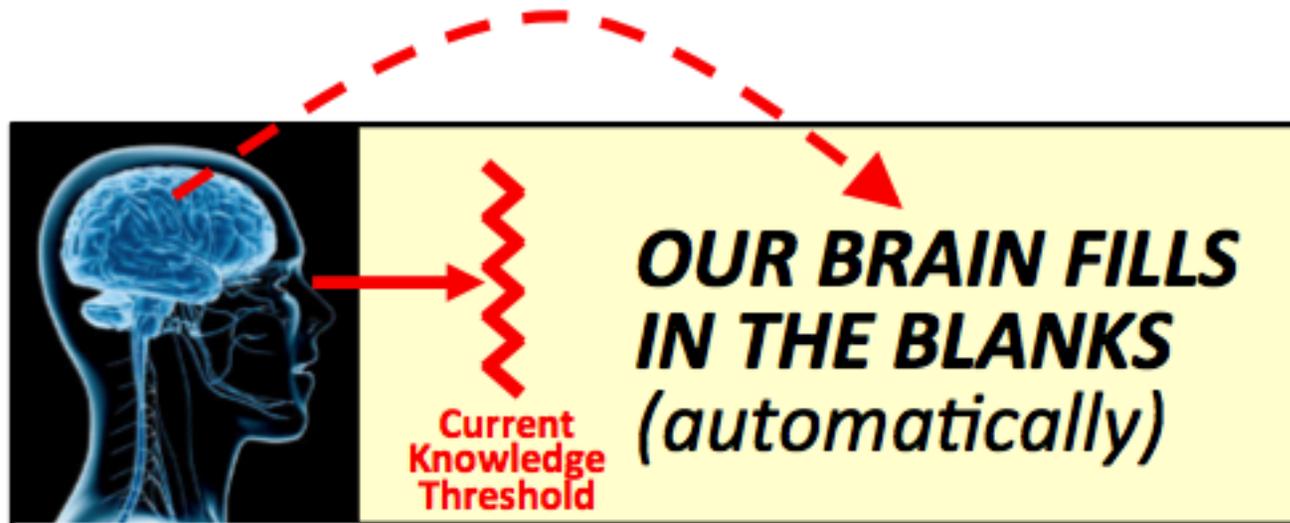
Scientific thinking is the best way we currently have for navigating such territory. At its core, it's a routine of intentional coordination between what we think will happen next (theory), what actually happens (evidence), and adjusting based on what we learn from the difference.

Scientific thinking gives us the ability to look beyond our preconceptions and see the world and ourselves in a truer light. It's a working pattern that makes us better at reaching difficult goals through unclear territory.



# PRACTICING FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS FOR SCIENTIFIC THINKING

Scientific thinking is not difficult, but it is not our natural, default mode. What happens instead is that our brain automatically, quickly and unconsciously fills in the blanks.



That unconscious human mechanism means that scientific thinking is a skill we *learn* through practice.

This book gives you a proven set of practice routines, or Kata, for developing more scientific skill in any organization. Kata are simple, structured routines that you practice at the beginning, to acquire foundational skills (habits) to build on. Kata make it easier to adopt new ways of thinking and acting.

# DELIBERATELY DEVELOPING YOUR TEAM'S SKILL AND YOUR ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE

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



## Consider the following:

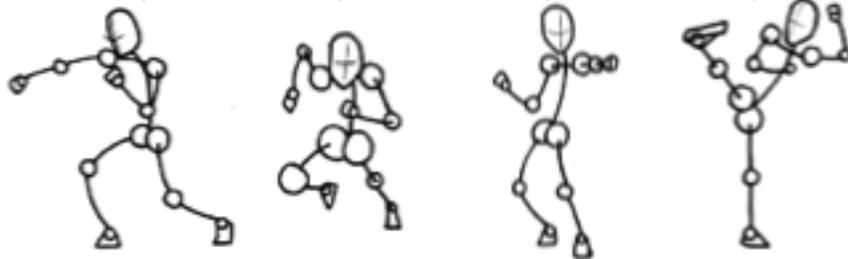
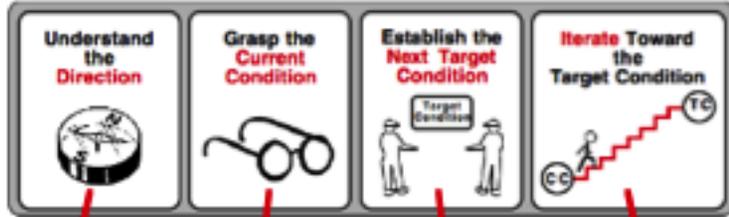
- ▶ The people in every organization have unconscious habits of thinking and acting. Those habits constitute the basis of the organization's culture.
- ▶ All managers are teachers, whether consciously or not. With their everyday words and actions managers teach their people a mindset and approach, which 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?*

# WHAT'S IN THIS PRACTICE GUIDE

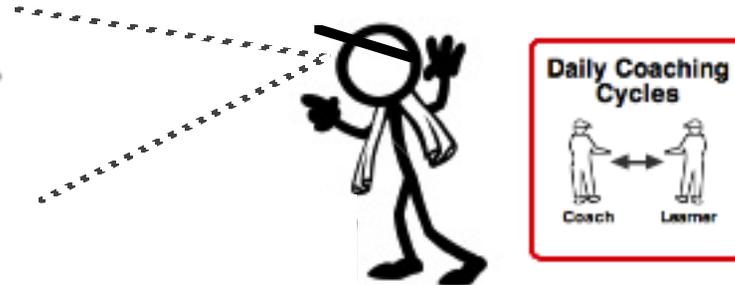
## The IMPROVEMENT KATA MODEL (A scientific approach)



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

## PRACTICE GUIDE PART I

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.

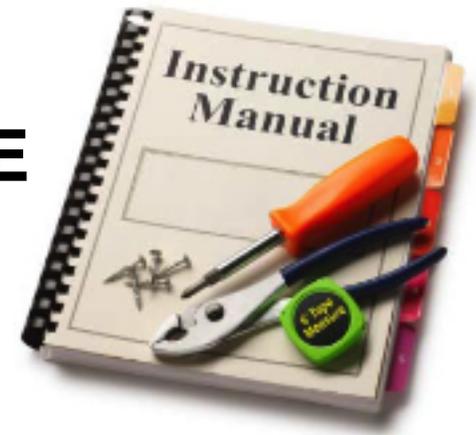


The **COACHING KATA** is a practice routine for teaching the Improvement Kata pattern. It's the Starter Kata for the Coach.

## PRACTICE GUIDE PART II



## WHO THIS PRACTICE GUIDE IS FOR

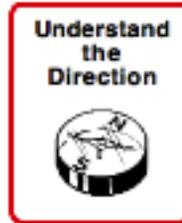


One user is the **Learner**, i.e., anyone who wants to become proficient in a scientific way of working and thinking, through practice.

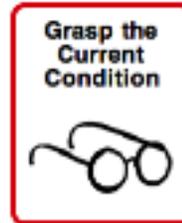
The other user is the **Coach**, i.e., anyone who manages people. Once you've internalized the Improvement Kata pattern yourself, this book helps you teach the pattern to others. The goal is to embed the Improvement Kata into the daily work of managers, who are the day-to-day teachers in any organization.

# USE EACH CHAPTER WHEN YOU ARE READY TO DO THAT STEP

**Setting the Challenge  
(Step 1)**



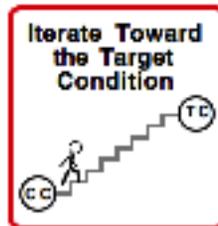
**Grasping the Current Condition  
(Step 2)**



**Establishing the Next Target Condition  
(Step 3)**



**Experimenting Toward the Target Condition  
(Step 4)**



**Conducting Daily Coaching Cycles**

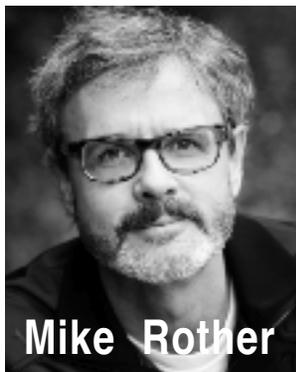
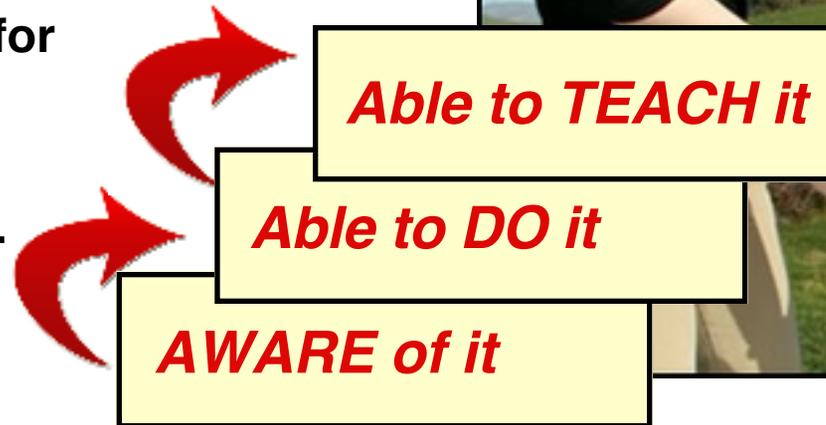
# TWO PURPOSES FOR THIS BOOK

## 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) *A Reference Guide:*

To be a reference for how to apply the patterns of the Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata.



Mike Rother

My goal in developing the IK/CK Practice Guide 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.

