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# Leading Effective Improvement Teams



"Those who cannot change their mind,  
cannot change anything....." George Bernard Shaw



## Introduction

I am happy to see that you have bought this book and that you are interested in developing leadership skills to lead an improvement team. It does not matter if you are a beginner or if you are more experienced, you will still benefit from going through the book. Understanding the tools and techniques and have a new language to discuss with your colleagues. Leading improvements and change is often perceived to be difficult and exhausting, as a matter of fact it can be, however by studying this book and trying to understand the tools and techniques found inside this book, it will help you to avoid some pitfalls. It will give you some tips and also help you to separate between the different issues connected to logical change and emotional change.

Every time you start any change initiative, In fact even when you just talk to anybody, and you explain something logically you will also get an emotional reaction. In this book and the upcoming chapters I will try to explain the difference between logic and emotion. Some might be obvious, but there are some parts that really separate the two that might be worth understanding. I will touch on some tools that will support you in the emotional area. Since most of the change is based on some logical need, I will give you an overview of the basic

concepts where you can have specific tools that you are actually using. Keep on reading and you will understand what I mean. Welcome! Enjoy the Ride!

Consider this, to run an improvement team and work with improvements and change in general it's mainly experiential. To give you an idea here are some specifics, 10% of the learning would be theoretical training, 20% of the learning will be some type of coaching and support and 70% of the learning will be experiential.

In this book sometimes you may see or read about something you may not understand exactly, I do suggest that you try to use the knowledge to fully understand it. Teaching others is sometimes like trying to explain to a person what it is like to be wet. Use only words to explain it to a person whose never been wet. That is going to take some time and will probably be a bit hard or even very hard. If you ask them to come and stand in the water next to you they are going to understand it at once and you do not need to explain so much.

So part of this book will advise you to do something and again I suggest that you try it out so you can understand what I mean. After that you can make your own choices, but you can make your choices based on your experience and not based on some type of analysis that you have done, with too little information.

### Some definitions:

When I'm talking about an improvement process, I'm talking about a process of improvement that never stops, it is continuous. The question is, what is a process? The definition of a process is activities you perform to deliver a result, however the process doesn't stop as apposed to a project that has a defined end.

For example: if you look at home, in our home, and I'm sure you have something very similar to this, when we have dirty laundry we put in the hamper, that's how we gather our dirty laundry and we take it to the laundry room where I normally will make a pareto analysis. I will take the clothes out sort them by colors and by water temperature, cold, warm and hot. Then I choose the pile that is biggest first, sometimes there is a need of getting something from a smaller pile and I will then make another decision. So basically, I made a deployment, I will put the clothes in the washing machine, clean the clothes. Then put them in the dryer, dry them take them out of the dryer, fold them and put away in the closets. I have now restored basic conditions of the clothes.

We will use them again, after use they will go back to the hamper, pareto analysis, she will wash, she will dry and fold. This is a process, so what we really try to do is to create a process of change that is so good that it almost copies the laundry process.

If you have a really good laundry process you will take care of your dirty laundry without even thinking about it, you just do it. Compare this with going to the river instead, a tough task and it happens rarely, like an improvement project. If you can create a situation where you just improve, without necessarily thinking so much about it, you have created a very good process. When you are focusing on getting that process of change in place you will meet people who are restricting, blocking or trying to make you fail, remember that this always happens and there are actions that you can take. You will have to reflect on the process and learn from what happens, but you are probably doing some thing good in improving and that will create emotional reactions. You really want these reactions since they tell you that you are changing and not just adjusting a bit.

I once had one guy that had work for me that came to my room and said “well I know you like this change thing, but I have to ask what is most important? Is it improving or is it producing?” I obviously knew that it was an impossible question to answer so I said to the guy, “I will answer your question if you answer my question first. What is most important to you inhale or exhale? He left the room...You just have to find a way to do both, If you only do one and not the other you will die that’s it, as a person or as a company

## Preparation

Preparing to start an improvement team is really important for its success and possibility of actually finishing a team on time. There are some key things to think about and I will guide you through them all.

We are going to talk about: The objectives, how to set up the objectives for a team, how to ensure the delegation is understood and a report back will be done precisely as you wanted. We are going to talk about deployment, deployment is a military term that talks about everything you need to do to prepare yourself to go into battle. When you say “fire” the deployment has ended. So what do you do when you are working with your deployment? Member selection, this is key. How do you choose members? What are the things to think about? And is there more to team membership than just the technical content of the person or the technical skills of a person? Time commitment involved, what is a reasonable time to make sure that you can finalize on time and how do you figure that out? How do you plan your improvements? How do you schedule your meeting or events and what is the difference between a meeting and an event? How do you create a sense of urgency for the work that you are doing? How do you connect people to make sure that they are engaged and not only involved?

## Objectives

When you set the objective for the team it is important that the objectives are narrow enough to make sure that they can use one method to solve the problem. The wider the scope the bigger the risk is that there will be “scope creeping”, which is where the team will slide to the side and start working with more and more unrelated things, because it seems to be within the objectives and within the scope of the team. By making the scope narrow, you can ensure that people can complete the assignment on time and use one specific method. This also makes it easier to train your organization. You might already have some people that are really good at solving problems and improving the business, however wouldn’t you rather have everyone engaged instead, rather than just a few people? In order to train other people, it is easier to train them in a method as opposed to trying to make them copy another person.

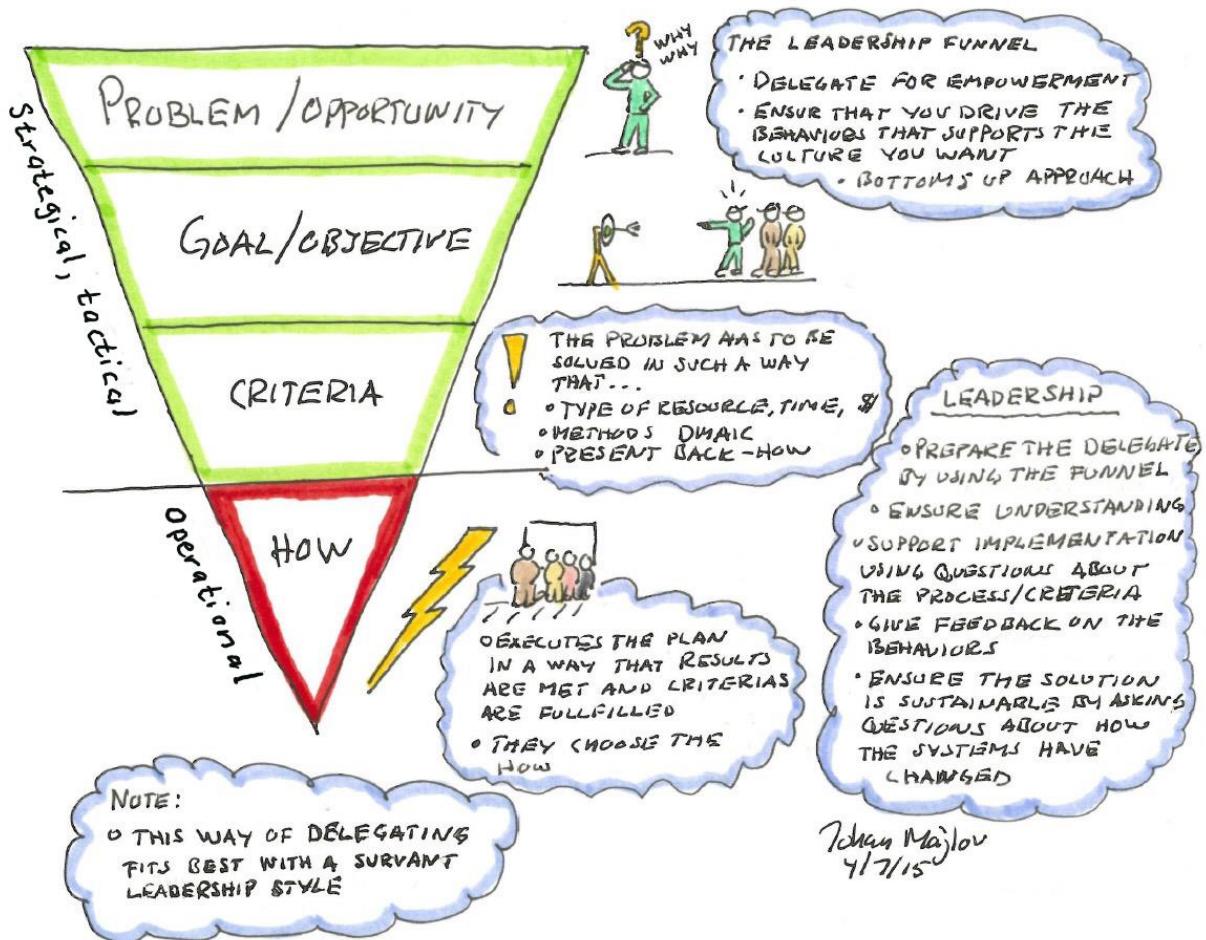
Objectives have to be specific, so the more specific you are the easier it will be to understand. There are some key tools to understand when it comes to delegation; one key tool is something that I call the “Leadership Funnel.” Think about this: you have a problem or an opportunity, when the problem is defined, and you understand where it comes from, the root causes and so on, you will specify and describe the problem clearly so that is it easy for other people to understand. It is important that you set a target or a goal, this is done to ensure that the person or the team that is receiving the delegation understands what you would like them to achieve, preferably something that is possible to measure so that it is a 100% clear whether or not you have reached the target. Please note that when you set a goal to achieve a certain target it is advised that you set a target that has to be met 3 consecutive weeks (for example) to be considered achieved, otherwise by pure luck or coincidence one could have met the target without actually completing the implementation.

When you have specified the PROBLEM and GOAL it’s time to for the third step before you delegate. This is a key step and often missed, you need to specify the CRITERIA to which the team has to apply. Criteria specifies in what way the problem has to be solved. For the work to be completed in the

way that you want it done, so that the team follows a specific process, communicates, reports back etc. In such a way, that you are certain that it has considered everything and at the same time given the team a chance to be creative and fully own the solution. If you were to name names or numbers specifically in the criteria you are being more operational than strategic, so PROBLEM, GOAL and CRITERIA is a strategically and tactical approach, when *HOW* to do it is an operational approach. The criteria for instance could be:

- ✓ Form a cross functional team that work together during the stated time period to solve the problem.
- ✓ Use a method so that you can follow a path and we could follow how you did it.
- ✓ Use a visual tool, like a team board to communicate between yourself and others.
- ✓ Etc...

To ensure that the information is clear of what you expect, think about how you want them to come back to you, in what way do you want them to specify what they have done? Do you want them to create standards, train people, share their new knowledge, spread the solutions? When you know what you want, and you have formed a problem, the goal and criteria clearly then you have completed your objectives. Now you can delegate this task to a team. See picture below.



When it comes to deployment, deployment is there to understand what you need to do to tackle the task ahead. The understanding of what the problem is, the *Root Cause Analysis* should ideally be done before you write down your objectives, if it has not been done the team has to take that task too. In order for you to actually solve the problem for real you need to understand the failure modes or your defect mode. For instance, "I have a flat tire, a flat tire is a problem and it is a failure or a loss. But how did you get the flat tire, was it because of a nail? because you were driving on a bumpy road? Do you have a flat tire because somebody cut your tires? Temperature variation? And so on. You need to understand what the underlying problem is and what needs to be solved. When you understand that, you understand the objective, you know what the real problem is.

At this point you need to decide how you are going to work on this. During the criteria specification, you need to state: if this is going to be an event, which means that you run this in 2-5 days, or if you are running this as an improvement team that you will run for about 12 weeks (3 months) which is a normal approach to reduce, eliminate or eradicate the loss. A rule of thumb is that as soon as you have to change people's mind sets you will need a longer time frame. So if a mindset change is required for people to work in a new way I suggest that you run it as a 12-week team. If you are doing simple things like rearranging something or painting, an event might be a little more appropriate. Sometimes an event can be used for analyzing and understanding a problem better.

## Member selection

How many participants should you have in a team? It is hard to say, but a good idea is between 4-6 people. Obviously, you need people who have the skills that can support you in the team, and it should be a cross functional team that makes your solution broader, with differing opinions that can help formulate a solid idea and solution. You also need to think about having the people able to work with one another, with that I mean you want them to be broader and not similar personality types. There are many ways to find out the personality types.

A simple way of doing it is to think about a farmer, a hunter and a rock blaster, let me explain. A farmer is a person who trusts the process and if you follow the process and complete all tasks, monitor everything daily you will get your reward later, which means they are going to build a very solid process and they are not in a hurry, they want to make sure they have all the data on the table, they complete every task, everything is done as it should be before they are done for the day.

A hunter is a person who goes out and finds food when they need it. When they want something, they go out and try to get it. A person who can act really quick, obtain and create the result fast, which is what their personality type gives. They do not necessarily have to be on their own, but they are strong in quick problem solving they are not necessarily going to build a strong process around them because when they get the food the hunter will eat and go out to hunt the next time that they need food. You need somebody like that too who will act and make things happen fast.

The third personality type is what I refer to as the rock blaster, the rock blaster is the type of person who comes up with the crazy ideas that nobody ever thought about. They are always thinking differently sort of "sideways" compared to everyone else, but they will find ways around the complicated obstacles that

you are facing. They will come up with one really good idea and 99 terrible ones, but they are going to love them all. That is kind of the bad side of the rock blaster, they love their own ideas, and they can get a little upset if you do not listen to them, but you do need them. However, you will run into situations where you really do not know what to do, this is a creative person that will find a way. One rock blaster is recommended so you don't run into problems with them competing with each other.

Imagine creating a team and looking at what people you think will have the technical capabilities to help you and your team, list the names. List also, farmer, hunter and rock blaster behind them, try to classify where people are, do you think they are a farmer, a hunter and rock blaster? Put down a vote for every person and then go for the level that is highest for every person. Not every person is clearly a farmer, hunter or rock blaster, you get the idea by doing that, this is a fast and simple way to understand personalities. There is other ways; however I find this way to be good enough, fast and no cost. If you can form a team like that, you have the technical compatibilities and you understand the personalities within the Team. When you run the team, you have to make sure that the people know why they are chosen and also what part of the farmer, hunter, rock blaster you expect them to actually have. This will make it easier for them to work together. If you explain the difference between the personality types, they can understand that they have different roles and they can help each other.

### Time commitment

If you are going to run or be part of a team you need to ensure that people have enough time. I use a rule of thumb to say that you should start by scheduling 3-4 hours per week on average, which is approximately 10% of the workweek for a person. This is good for a 12-week team. By doing that you have a good pace and you can ensure that people can meet each other to create new ideas, and understand the problem. It is not advisable to start with one team, and then make changes in personnel of that Team along the way. A team also develops its own life, and by changing people in the team, the team process (the development for the team) has to re-start and you are going to lose traction by doing that. Make sure you look at the people's calendars before you start. Sometimes you run into periods where people are gone for vacations etc. that is not ideal, I would rather have someone else on the Team, even though they might not be as skilled. When you have formed your team, you have to understand the problem, goal and criteria, and that the objectives are clear. They have to understand why your company, your department and maybe why your process needs their focus and what your team is supposed to do to ensure that this is happening. Too often teams lose time due to unclear objectives.

A sense of urgency is a feeling, an emotion, that tells you what you are going to do is important and that we have to get going. It does not say that we know exactly what to do yet; however it says that we know we have to do something and why we have to be a part of it. There are some different ways of doing this but one simple way to start with is SEE, FEEL and REWARD. Describing the reasons behind the decisions to start the team can be described as.

- ✓ What are the problems short term and what are the problems long term if you do not make the change?
- ✓ How will it make you feel if you did not do this? How would it make you feel if something did not go right, and you end up with something that somebody else will have to take over, such as if the problem is not solved.

- ✓ Thirdly what are the rewards that the company can get, the team can get as well as every individual person in the team.

So, *See, Feel, Reward* are three steps that will explain to the team on a logical and emotional level why the need is there. If the team doesn't respond, as you want them to, they do not have a sense of urgency. One way of measuring that is do they show up to the meetings, complete the tasks that you assign to them between the meetings? If that is not happening, you can take it further and probably talk to the participants individually, to understand what can be done to get them engaged.

## Two Focuses

As a team leader you need to be able to have two different focuses. One focus has to be on the result, that the team has to achieve according to the objectives that were set, and the delegation from whomever started the team; a steering committee, a pillar or any other type of management team.

The results are obviously important, but you are not supposed to drive towards the result with any type of means, you have to remember that an improvement team and the method used is a process. Thus, as a team leader your job is to also ensure that you are following the process, that everybody on the team understands the process and learns from it. If you are able to do that, you are growing problem solvers in your organization that potentially, could run the same type or similar type of teams in the future.

You always need to keep the focus on 0-1-100, (zero losses, one agenda and 100% engagement), as well as on the PDCA process, (more on PDCA process and other processes later). Processes like how to eradicate losses and hold the gains. Therefore, the team leader's job is to focus on the process, because by developing a process, it will deliver the right results. I believe it was Albert Einstein who said, "The definition of Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again (the process) and expecting different results."

To build a process of change in your organization, the Team leader ensures that the team is building the process and is delivering the right results.

## The Improvement Process

The actual process of improvement is basically the same for everything that you do, at least in the way that I am trying to explain it. Remember that whichever method you are using you can insert it here, but let me explain about the structure of an improvement method, at least a good one. First of all, you have to remember the following:

- What is the loss?
- You have to understand what is the actual root cause of the problem?
- And that you are measuring it (You try to understand how much of something, the frequency or the combination of the two).

### Improvement processes have three phases:

#### Phase 1: Restore Basic Conditions

Restore basic conditions mean that if a machine was new, it was producing to the correct levels, correct speed, correct quality etc. At that time there would have been standards to work around the machine, and the machine was producing and performing to a certain standard.

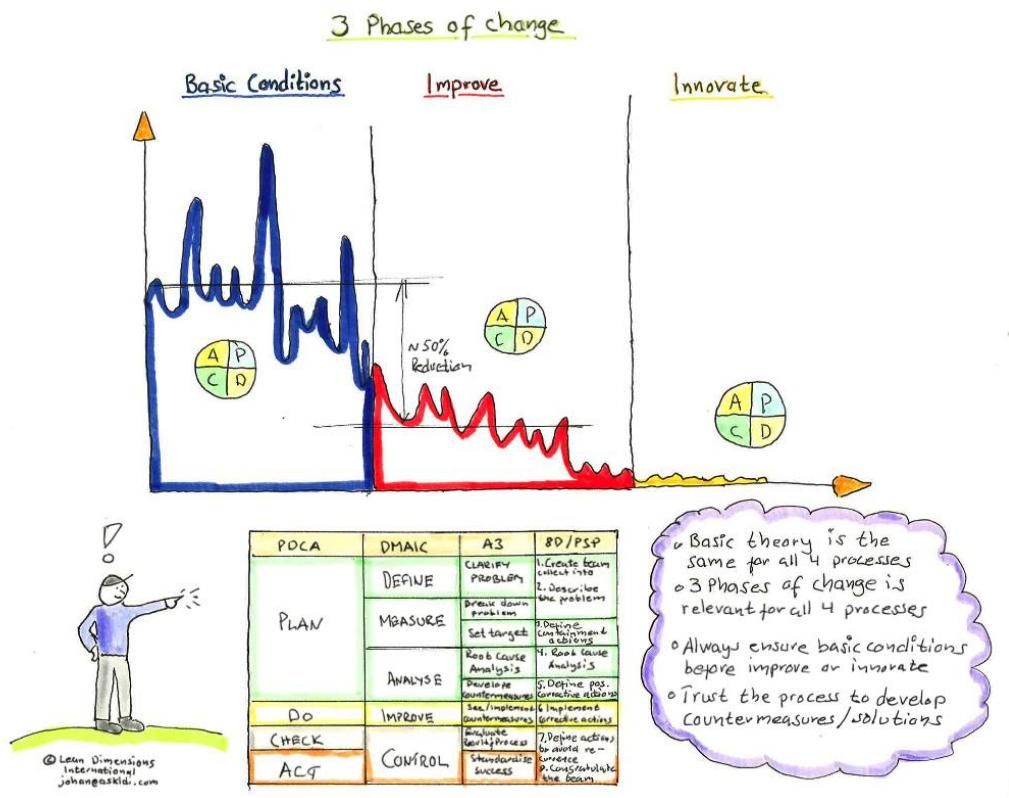
It is possible to restore that machine and the work associated to it back to the basic conditions. By doing so often at least 50% of the problem disappears. There is a rule of thumb that in the restore phase 50% of the problem is reduced. Remember that sometimes you do not actually have or never had a basic condition. For example a work content that you have never done before, however you want to restore or at least create a basic condition. A basic condition means that everybody who is doing the work or has performed tasks in the same way, it does not matter what shift they are working on or who they are, we all perform to a certain standard. When we have that standard in place and the same concept for everyone is used then we can go to the next phase.

#### Phase 2: Improvement

So from the basic conditions we start to improve. Often we have to start to understand if there are any anomalies connected to the basic condition that we all working to. By understanding that, we can also eradicate the anomalies. In this phase together we can improve the process, remember that we can have a process that we improve as opposed to improving every individual person.

#### Phase 3: Innovate

Not all improvements need innovation before you have eradicated the loss, but if they do this phase comes last. One example could be that you have a chronic quality problem that even though you have restored basic conditions and improved it, it is still there. This is when we will use six sigma tools to eradicate a chronic problem. Six-sigma is a more advanced statistical process to attack losses.



For all of the three phases there is one concept that guides everything. Actually, this concept builds every improvement tool that exists; there are versions of it like DMAIC, more on that later.

That concept is referred to as PDCA, it means “Please Don’t Change Anything”, NO it doesn’t! It means *Plan, Do, Check, Act!* These are four steps that if performed correctly, drive the improvement in each phase. So this means that the basic conditions phase has PDCA built into it, the improvement phase also has PDCA built into it as well as the innovative phase.

PDCA means that you start in the P step (Planning Phase) by fully understanding the problem; you do a root-cause analysis and really understand what is behind what you see as an unwanted result, you can say a symptom. In the plan phase you do the root cause analysis and if you can you will use data to understand what the problem is. This is to ensure that you think about all the different areas, like what type of problems can come from a man, machine, material, method and Mother Nature? By having that guidance it is likely that you will find the root cause but you are not certain.

From your root-cause analysis it is time to create some type of idea, a hypothesis on what will actually solve your problem, what actions could you take and what countermeasures will you take to eradicate your loss?

Now is time to set a target. You need to set a target to ensure that the activities you take, everything that you implement will ensure that you actually have an effect that eradicates your loss. You start measuring your loss so that you understand whether your actions have an effect on it or not. So during the P Phase you will understand the problem you will set a target, you will create a master plan, who should do what by when? Ensure that you have the resources both in people and money and after that it’s time to go into step #2 or step Do where you basically implement your plan.

So the plan that you created in step P is now implemented in Do. The *Do* step is fairly simple, in one sense it is just about implementing what you have planned to do.

The *Check* step is about checking “did I have the right plan? Was the idea that we had to eradicate the loss correct?” The way to check that is to track your target. Or your KPI (key performance indicator), the measurement to see that you are driving it toward the right direction.

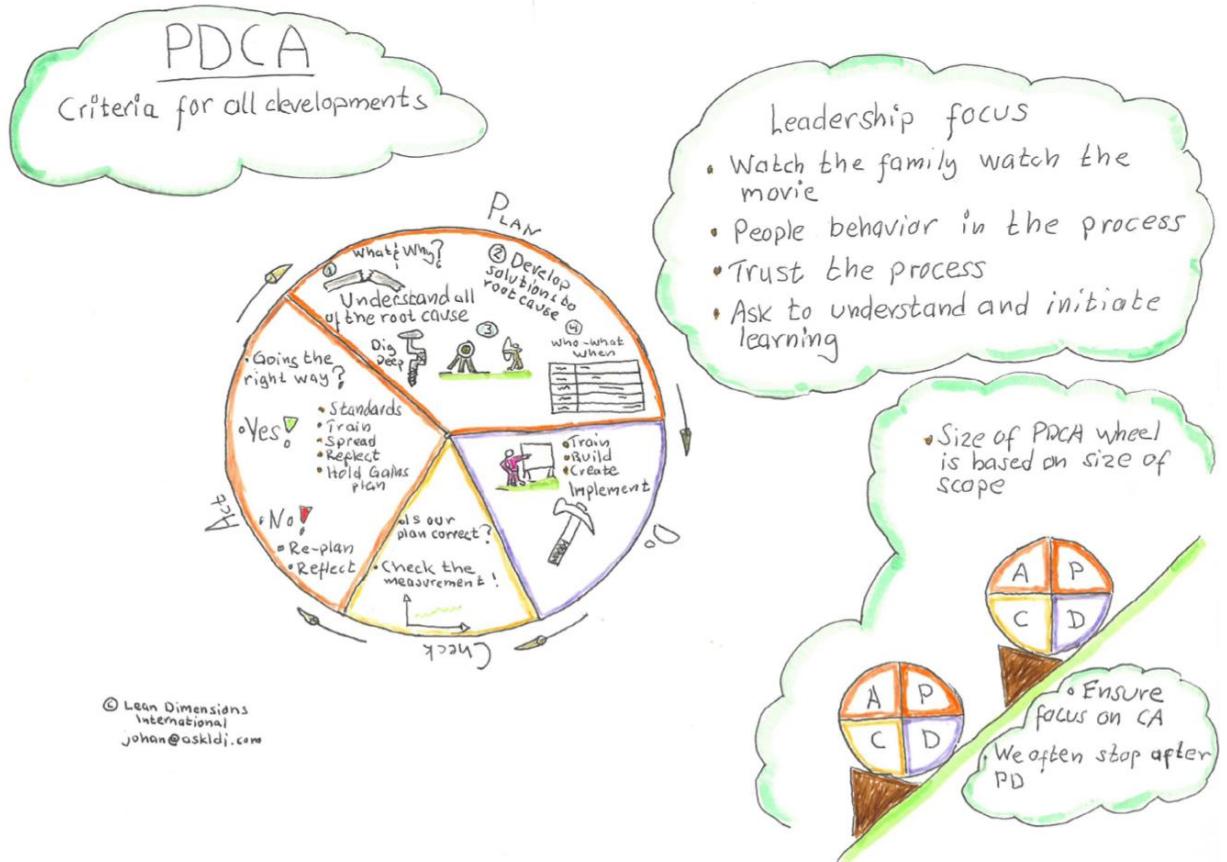
So if you want to reduce for example a quality defect and you have implemented some of your activities, can you see in your measurement that you are having an effect on the target now? If you can see that the check says “I have the right plan” you are in good shape.

There is a logical and an emotional side to change. Which means that just because you are paying attention to things, engaging people and caring about the certain type of topic, you will have an effect on that measurement, the KPI (Key Performance Indicator). The effect is very fragile because if you leave it now and don't implement any technical change to it you might lose the engagement from people and that effect will go away rapidly. So an effect before the actual implementation is done doesn't mean anything but engagement is achieved. So if you have a positive trend on your KPI, the *Act* step means standardize, keep doing what you are doing. Or if you have reached the target *Act* means standardize, train people, spread the knowledge and develop a way to know that you hold your gains after you close the team. For example, when measuring your KPI for 26 weeks or so to ensure that the KPI is still in control and that all the changes are implemented and sustained.

If you are in the *Check* step and you see that you do not have an effect on your KPI, the *Act* step means re-plan. Your ideas and the countermeasure that you implemented are not correct. They do not give you the effect that you want so you have to go back to the *P* step and re-plan, and develop a new idea that will eradicate your loss. I am sure that you understand that the *P* step is the most important one, since if you get the planning wrong everything else is wrong too. Spend time to make sure that you understand everything before you start.

Please note that true change or continuous improvement is built on understanding losses, going in depth and understanding where the root cause is to the problem that you see. By doing that you can build a consensus in your team around a countermeasure, around an idea and together you form a plan and eradicate a loss.

Another way of working with improvements more sporadically is based on the idea that there are a certain number of people who have good ideas. These good ideas have to be implemented and you need to convince people that it is really their idea to win them over and to get them to work with you. I struggle a little bit with that concept mainly because it is based on manipulation of other people and in the long run you will never win. You want people to buy in and feel that they really have a say in the change, ask them to really be engaged and not just involved in doing something. So I suggest that you spend time on understanding the losses and build consensus around counter measures together in your team. Then you do not have to convince anybody on your team about implementing the idea because it was the team's idea, and they will naturally just implement and drive it. This also creates ownership as opposed to just understanding.



Something to look out for is THE FAKED PDCA, this is when you have a solution based on an idea and you pretend to use the PDCA approach. If you think you have the right solution without any root cause analysis done, go ahead and implement it, but don't pretend to follow the process.

DMAIC is a thinking developed for six sigma. It is a good process and following it is very much like following PDCA. In some organizations they like that better due to the fact that the steps are describing what you should do a bit better than PDCA. Whichever one you choose (PDCA or DMAIC) make sure you set it as a standardized approach for the whole organization and train people. I have never seen any evidence that one is better than another.

## Team Leader

As a team leader your role is to obviously ensure that the team is meeting the objectives in the correct way. Well here are some thoughts about what you should be looking for when you are running a team. An experienced team leader knows how to handle a team, meaning that they are ensuring that everyone is working, the workload is split and they are using the strengths of the people that you have on the team. You are using the technical skills maybe from yourself or other specialists, and you follow the method to make sure that you know the process is correct. So when you prepare yourself for a team meeting the following are some points that you need to consider.

You will need three documents to review before you go to a team meeting; this is excluding the agenda that you should create for every meeting. The three documents are:

- The **audit sheet or the audit system** that you put in place for your team following the PDCA thinking. Some companies have a standard audit you can use. Sometimes you will need to create your own and the thinking is that you are following the PDCA process.
- The second document that you should have is the **method/play** that you are following. What are the steps that you need to take? What are the activities that you need to do? What are the tools that you are supposed to be using? Make sure that you understand them and that you are aware of why they are used, when they are used and so on.
- The third is the **objectives**; to ensure that you have the delegation from the person that started the team is clear so that you can keep the team on target. Remember the Problem, Goal, Criteria?

So the audit system, the method you are using and the objectives, these are the three documents that you need to prepare yourself with and to create the agenda. Your focus has to be 0-1-100, zero losses, one agenda and 100% engagement. Follow the PDCA system, eradicating the losses and sustaining the gains. I recommend that you start your meetings using your team board. Allow different people in your team to present what you were doing; where you are etc. This will ensure that you know that they understood the process so far. It's a good GAP analysis to allow someone to explain where you are because you will hear if they have understood or not.

The process to use to build an agenda is the following:

The first thing you need to do is to review the action plan from the last meeting. You can do that by the machine, by team board or you can do it wherever you meet.

The second thing to do is to look at the method, and if needed, train on theory to ensure that everybody understands what the method says to do next. Sometimes you will need to go back and re-train on past steps. This depends on what you hear when the Team is presenting their Team board. If the team is struggling with any of the activities or they don't understand the methods. Then, this is a good indicator that you need to re-train.

The third, you will coach the team on the practical work that you need to do according to the steps that you are in. And then after that you will do a self-audit for the team to ensure that you are following the process, doing everything that you need to do and the detail that you need to do it. You will then finalize by creating a new action plan for the coming week when you might have to do some work outside of the team meeting. This means that when you come back next time you will start by reviewing, training on theory, coaching on practical work, do a self-audit and create a new action plan.

This process is used over and over until it is time for you to close the team, your agenda should be built on this process. I recommend that you create an agenda for every meeting to ensure that you can drive flow in the meeting. As a team leader you also need to prepare and think about the people in your team. The more advanced or the more experienced the team leader is, they are also thinking about the FIRO process which is the team development process.

FIRO stands for **F**undamental **I**nterpersonal **R**elations **O**rientation, and the team leader is thinking about which phase the team is in, Inclusion, control or affection. Depending on the phase the team leader has to differentiate types of leadership styles. It is good to be aware especially in the control phase when you start to get conflicts that it does not have to do with you but a natural development of the team. The team leader also has to think about how to communicate with the team, it is good to have a communication plan. Think about how the team board can be used to spread the knowledge and prepare people for the team being closed and people have to work to new standards.

You will also work and prepare yourself from giving and receiving feedback. Giving feedback you will use the BEST model, the Behavior, Explain, Suggest and Talk about future steps. To receive feedback it is important to understand that every person is prone to react differently to feedback. The target is to always understand and accept the feedback so that you can chose if you want to adjust your behavior or not. But the key is to give feedback on behavior and not on the person.

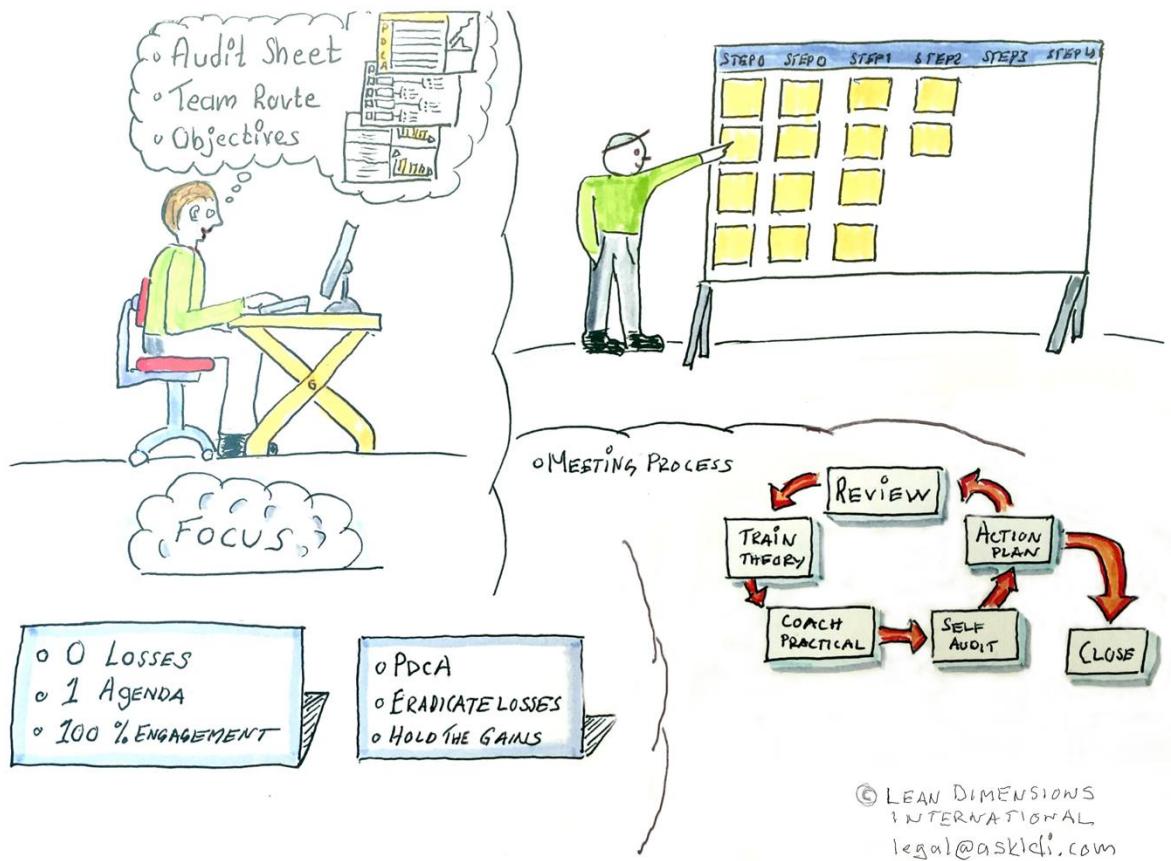
By the end of the teams work when you started implementing change, you can run into situations where the organization starts to resist, which is good because then you are really implementing true change and not just minor adjustments. So remember, when you start to create tension in the organization, there is an entanglement of systems that you are affecting and that people are reacting to. If you can manage to stay calm and keep them moving and taking care of the different tensions and entanglements, that is when you create the real change.

If you stop and allow the tension, as well as let the people resisting stop you from implementing what you want to do, you have not implemented real change, and you have only made a minor adjustment. Sometimes we do that because we feel stress and pressure from people around us and that is normal. We have to remember that this is a natural reaction from people around us and it is not really necessarily because they do not like the change. It maybe because it creates work that they were not prepared for and they have been living certain norms and practices for many years, and they have yet to see the reason to actually change.

So you need to review what is actually happening and act accordingly. Try to figure out what is going on and see what you can do to release tension or untangle yourself to rule. But remember you are not alone. A Team leader is leading the team and the leader does not have to do everything on their own. The best team leaders I have seen make sure that they are a resource for the team, ensuring that the team is growing and moving and the team leader is helping other people grow.

A good team leader does not have to have all the spot lights of them. You can have the spot lights on your team, by doing that you will have the spot lights on yourself. Maybe it does not seem like that. But everybody knows that the team has succeeded because of your way of leading and inspiring people, allowing them to grow and move. By doing this you create loyalty around you and loyalty to give you power and possibilities to move forward. Both in your career and also by doing more improvement work. It is funny when you think about it the more power you give away to other people the more power you get, that is something to remember. Sometimes we feel we lose power when we give it to other people but it is actually the opposite.

To create a good feeling in a team is absolutely key, if you would go back and think about situations when you had the best experience, think about this. Did you remember what people said in the teams, what people had written down, or what standards were created? Do you remember how those made you feel? I will argue that most of the time we remember how we felt doing something, and a person who is good at creating a good atmosphere where people feel safe, they can perform, work together and be happy. They have fun and they get praise for the things that they actually do. A lot of people just by being allowed to do work and implement things are fantastic opportunities for a lot of people. So remember that, creating a nice feeling atmosphere in your team will take you much further than rules and regulations and showing that you are the person who knows best.



## Audits

The word auditing comes from the Latin word *auditus* which means listening, so auditor is a person who will come and listen. This means for an improvement team you should ask someone from the outside. If you have a steering committee or any type of leading team, or in some different types of program you might even have pillars. It is very common within a world class manufacturing or TPM system to have pillars and the pillars then audit the teams. Or if you would like to have some outside support for your team, you can ask them to come and audit your team.

Let us assume that you are running a 12 week improvement team, as a minimum I recommend that you have 3 audits, after 4, 8 and 12 weeks. The 12 week audit is also called the final audit, I will come back to that later when I will talk about the closing of a team. An audit has a purpose, the objectives of an audit are to support the team to stay on target, to ensure that they understand the process and that they follow the process of the improvement team. If you refer back to the chapter on improvement processes or improvement phases you can see the phases where restore basic conditions, improve and innovate and within every phase we are following the PDCA approach (Plan, Do, Check Act).

So an auditor should also follow that approach, an auditor should also be aware of which phase the team is in and then ask questions according to the PDCA approach, to ensure that the process is followed and understood by the team. A good auditor also leaves the team with energy after the audit, so the target is to understand where they are, if they need any support and make sure that they understand what they have done well and what they might need to improve. However, make sure that the auditor also understands that the team needs support and energy; a bad auditor will leave the team deflated only considering all the problems.

So a good audit process could look like this, the team is waiting for the auditor or auditors and will present where they are at the moment using the team board, that I recommended every team have. They will tell the story about where the team is, so that the team leader or a representative, or preferably several people that are a part of the team is presenting the current status and what is achieved, and what they are looking forward to do. Then by doing so the auditors are listening to where they are and will ask questions according to the PDCA thinking. So they will ensure that the planning phase, the do, check and act is done properly. The questions are normally asked open ended so that you do not have “yes” or “no” responses, and that you explain the way of thinking and the auditor will then have a better understanding. This will help confirm that the team has understood the concept and the process. Sometimes an auditor can also ask a question implying that something should have been done. For instance: during the planning phase an auditor could ask what type of *root-cause analysis* did you use? This implies that you should have done a *root-cause analysis* and nobody can answer with a simple “yes” or “no”. This can drive the behaviour that you want in a team as an auditor, on the other hand back to your own team. After the audit the team leader should make sure that the team understands the auditor’s comments, support and questions, as well as have a lessons learned session after the audit. Lessons learned are key for a team to gather along the whole process, the lessons learned are transferred to the next team that starts a similar type of problem-solving initiative, so we do not run into similar types of problems again.

## Team Close

Assuming that you have been running the team for 12 weeks, we are now in week 12 and it is time to close the team. I always recommend that you will aim to close the team at 12 weeks even though you are not ready. My thinking behind that is that if you have a target to close after 12 weeks we should try to close, and if we cannot we should learn from the reason why we did not close.

Whatever the reason could be, the objectives or the scope is too big, could not take the time or using people that went on vacation, had to change the team leader, or technical difficulties, or we could not agree on the team, whichever happened we should learn from that. However let us assume that we are ready to close the team at 12 weeks. For a company I always recommended that you create a closing checklist to ensure that every improvement team that you build follows the same approach. There are some key points to closing a team, these include:

For all phases, Basic Conditions, Improve and Innovate, the PDCA is relevant and the full PDCA cycle has to be worked through for a phase to be completed. Not all improvement teams will go through all three phases. You need to decide that when you start, whichever phase that you are in that you decided to close at has to have the PDCA steps closed before you can close the team.

A key part of closing a team and in the A part the Act part is to make sure that we have standards , one point lessons, or standard operating procedures done. There also has to be training for the team itself, an internal training matrix captures the training that should be done for any team. Also for the external people, the people who are now going to be affected by the new way of working that the team has implemented. So a training matrix for internal and external people is needed. You will also need to have a performance indicator. The performance indicator could be the one that you have been using along the way for the team, and that indicators role is to say let us follow this indicator for 26 weeks is a good rule of thumb. It should stay within control limits, so if the indicator is within the control limits for 26 weeks we can consider the gains to be held and we do not need to keep following that KPI or performance indictor anymore.

When choosing the performance indictor you will need to have some type of criteria. For example, if the performance indicator is outside of the control limit for 3 consecutive weeks. The team leader has to be called back and huddle up with the team again to understand what happened, and to try and understand why we do not hold the gains. What are the reasons and see if we can get back on track again.

Other than that when you close the team you also have to consider auditing the new way of working that you implemented. Let's say that you have created a new type of process it could be around a machine to clean, inspect, lubricate and tighten the equipment. You need to implement some type of CILT standard that can be used and a manager of that area, who is accountable of the work in that area, can audit to ensure that the standard is followed. If you are working in a business process or administration area of some sort you might want to consider other types of process standards, process reliability standards, where you would look at key components to the process, to ensure that the standard is being followed. Remember, that the line manager is the person that is accountable for the area or the process. They are the ones that should be auditing the process apart from following performance indicators.

It is recommended to have some type of visual system that controls the output of the team. What I mean by that is when the team is closed and the team board is taken down, you need to keep on following the performance indicators and following standards and so on. Therefore it is recommended that you use a machine boards where you can keep documentations close to the machine area where you have performed your improvements, or a process board if you are working in the business process area. This machine board or process board can contain different types of information but they should contain the performance indicator, the criteria for calling back the team. The audits that are performed in the process, also an audit of the actual board and audit schedules and so on. Often one point lessons are on the same board together with any uncompleted tasks from the team, so they are controlled after the team is closed. It is recommended to try to close all outstanding tasks while the team is running, but sometimes we may run into situations where we cannot close everything. For example: we can have a maintenance task or an IT task or something that will take a bit more time, you might want to control that on a process or machine board.

Remember also that when the team has achieved the target and you close the team, having a chance to celebrate, discuss lessons learned and actually enjoy the fact that you actually achieved something good together, will, help you in the future to run teams and get people engaged. By doing this it will mean you won't need to put so much time and energy into the next project.

Because when it is fun it is easier for everyone, for you as a team leader but also as the team members. It is important to ensure that the receiver of the new standards and the owner of the machine board and process board is established and that there is a hand off to that person when the team is closed. One thing to think about is that if you look at how much energy you need to put into any change, 20% of the energy is to find the problems and eradicate them, and 80% is toward all the gains so the closing and the delivery of the performance indicators is vital. The audits and so on are not to be taken lightly because here is where it is easiest to fail. The focus is gone from the improvement area where people have celebrated, where no one will follow up nor care if the standards that we are supposed to work towards are not happening. It only takes a couple of times where someone is breaking those standards without anybody reacting to it before old habits come back again. However, it is all about creating good processes, a good process of holding the gains will ensure that you do not fall back to the old behaviours and the closing part is key to hand over to that process.

