

# Managing to Learn

*Using the A3 management process to solve problems,  
gain agreement, mentor, and lead*

by John Shook

Foreword by Jim Womack

The Lean Enterprise Institute  
Cambridge, MA, USA  
[lean.org](http://lean.org)

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# Chapter 1

## What Is an A3?

The term “A3” refers to an international-size piece of paper, one that is approximately 11-by-17 inches. Within Toyota and other lean companies, the term means much more.

Toyota’s insight many years ago was that every issue an organization faces can and should be captured on a single sheet of paper. This enables everyone touching the issue to see through the same lens. While the basic thinking for an A3 (*see pages 8–9*) follows a common logic, the precise format and wording are flexible, and most organizations tweak the design to fit their unique requirements.

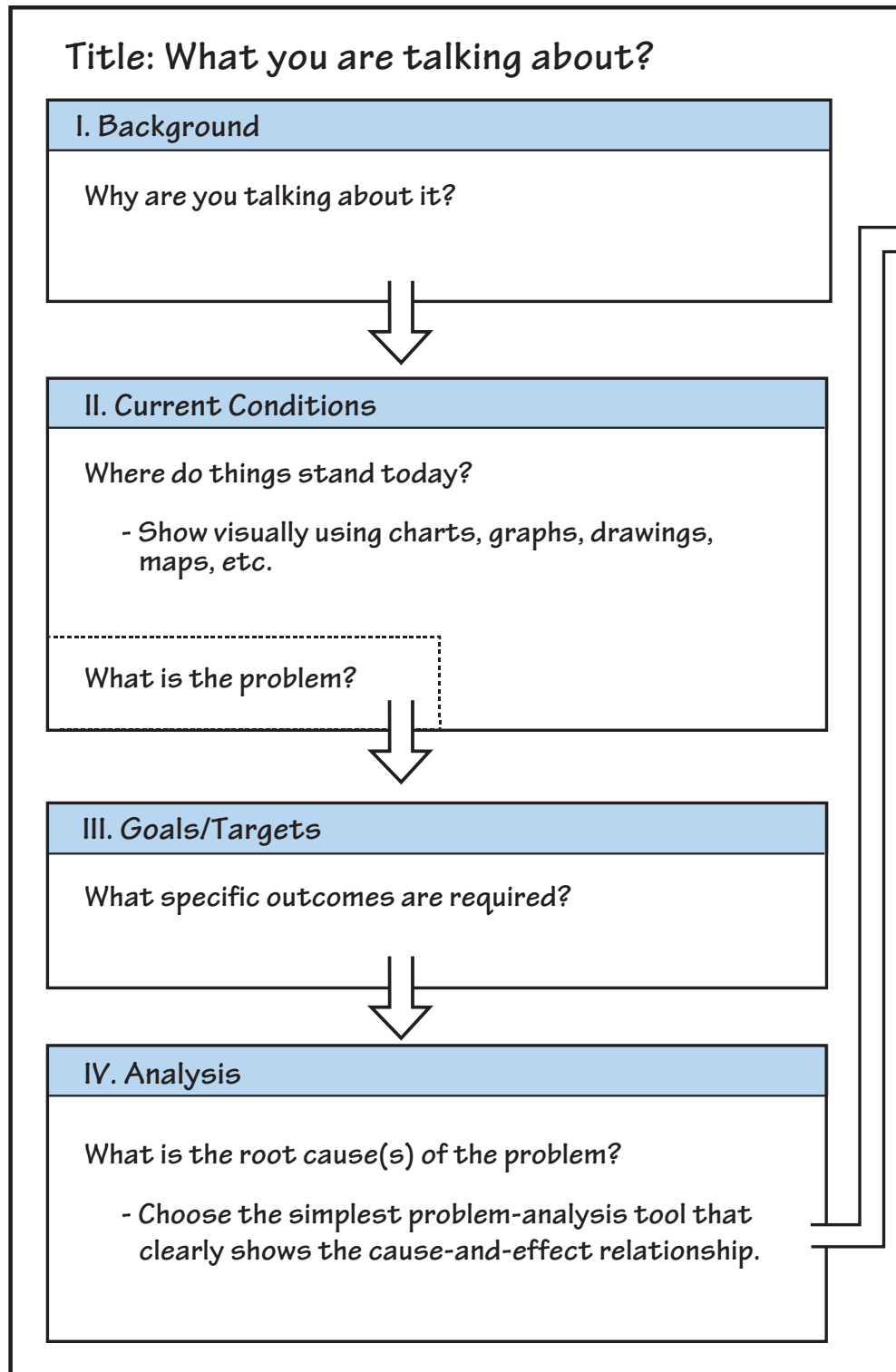
The A3 is like a résumé that can be adapted in layout, style, and emphasis according to the person seeking the job and the type of job being sought. Practitioners can adapt the format to fit the requirements of each situation.

On a single page, an A3 typically includes the following elements:

- *Title*—Names the problem, theme, or issue.
- *Owner/Date*—Identifies who “owns” the problem or issue and the date of the latest revision.
- *Background*—Establishes the business context and importance of the issue.
- *Current Conditions*—Describes what is currently known about the problem or issue.
- *Goals/Targets*—Identifies the desired outcome.
- *Analysis*—Analyzes the situation and the underlying causes that have created the gap between the current situation and the desired outcome.
- *Proposed Countermeasures*—Proposes some corrective actions or countermeasures to address the problem, close the gap, or reach a goal.
- *Plan*—Prescribes an action plan of who will do what when in order to reach the goal.
- *Followup*—Creates a followup review/learning process and anticipates remaining issues.



## A3 Template



Source: John Shook and David Verble

Owner/Date				
<b>V. Proposed Countermeasures</b>				
<p>What is your proposal to reach the future state, the target condition?</p> <p>How will your recommended countermeasures affect the root cause to achieve the target?</p>				
↓				
<b>VI. Plan</b>				
<p>What activities will be required for implementation and who will be responsible for what and when?</p> <p>What are the indicators of performance or progress?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incorporate a Gantt chart or similar diagram that shows actions/outcomes, timeline, and responsibilities. May include details on specific means of implementation.</li> </ul>				
↓				
<b>VII. Followup</b>				
<p>What issues can be anticipated?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure ongoing PDCA.</li> <li>- Capture and share learning.</li> </ul>				

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These A3 elements follow one another in a natural and logical sequence. The links among the problem, its root causes, the goal, the actions proposed to achieve the goal, and the means of judging success are clear and easy to understand.

The format and the goals of the A3 are guided by the following set of questions:

1. What is the problem or issue?
2. Who owns the problem?
3. What are the root causes of the problem?
4. What are some possible countermeasures?
5. How will you decide which countermeasures to propose?
6. How will you get agreement from everyone concerned?
7. What is your implementation plan—who, what, when, where, how?
8. How will you know if your countermeasures work?
9. What followup issues can you anticipate? What problems may occur during implementation?
10. How will you capture and share the learning?

It can't be stressed enough that there's no one fixed, correct template for an A3. To illustrate this point, the back pocket of this book contains several A3 examples illustrating some of the problems, proposals, decisions, projects, plans, and issues they can address. The author decides what to emphasize depending on the specific situation and context. It is not the format of the report that matters, but the underlying thinking that leads the participants through a cycle of PDCA (plan, do, check, act).

As you will read in the coming pages, completing and then discussing the material in an A3 forces individuals to observe reality, present facts, propose working countermeasures designed to achieve the stated goal, gain agreement, and follow up with a process of checking and adjusting for actual results. As a result, the A3 represents a *powerful tool* for problem-solving, making improvements, and getting things done.