

Outstanding Training Results with the A3 Coaching Dojo

by Pia Anhede, Revere AB

Training to coach someone in problem solving give benefits even if you not will coach in the future. Deliberate practice of coaching deepens problem-solving skills and will help you to really solve the actual root-causes and improve.



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For long, I have been training teams and managers in solving problems by applying the A3 thinking. To do so, I have them practice with a made-up case as well as real cases. I emphasize the importance of defining the problem precisely, describing the current condition with facts, work through the left side of the A3 before jumping into solutions, etc.

Following the A3 format will not automatically prevent us from making false assumptions and jumping to conclusions before understanding the problem deep enough. People once trained in the method are expected to flawlessly problem-solve afterward. This is not the case. We need somebody to coach us when working with problem-solving and the A3. We need a coach to challenge us in the depth of problem analysis and the logic of our reasoning when it comes to solutions.

Therefore, for about a year, I have started to use the Coaching Dojo for helping managers to practice their coaching skills. This hands-on training is much appreciated by managers and coaches. We call it the A3 Coaching Dojo.

Facts about A3

A3 is a structured problem solving and improvement approach. It provides a procedure with the purpose of deeply understanding the problem and finding the root cause before developing counter-measures. The A3 builds on the PDCA learning cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act), a scientific method of hypothesis – experimentation – evaluation. A3 is widely used throughout organizations from industry, service, healthcare, and the public sector.

Facts about the Coaching Dojo

The Coaching Dojo provides a training setup where coaches can repeatedly practice a series of specially designed training exercises and role play in a safe offline environment. This setup allows coaches to improve their skills through repeating coaching situations at a much higher frequency than would occur in reality.

Imagine your organization having a permanent training center for managers, supervisors, and team leaders where they can practice their coaching and communication skills continuously. The idea of the Coaching Dojo has been created by Tilo Schwarz.

Then something interesting happened. In one of the organizations where I have been running both trainings, the A3 for all teams as well as the Coaching Dojo for all managers, two executives came up with a challenging idea. Couldn't all employees benefit from participating in an A3 Coaching Dojo training? The purpose was to get the employees better understand why coaching the A3 process was needed, as they have faced some resistance for coaching. I was really hesitant questioning why we should train coaching skills to people who are not actively coaching, nor will become coaches in the future.

The two managers were really persistent. They wanted everyone in their organization to have the same training and thereby the same understanding. So, I gave in and started to run Coaching Dojos with all the teams.

Something amazing and unexpected happened!

From the A3 training, people learned how to use an A3 and developed a certain level of problem-solving skills. By adding the A3 Coaching Dojo people developed a much deeper understanding of the A3 method and gained better problem-solving skills more quickly. I was amazed to see this development and to listen to their discussions and their reflections coming back to their on-going problem solving and real-life A3:s.

What happened? When being put into the role of Coach, people had to understand a couple of things to be able to practice:

- To be able to coach, you need a reference for evaluating the given answers. In this case, the reference was the A3 method.
- To be able to coach, you need to understand what a good answer to each step is and what is not.
- To be able to coach, you need some techniques to ask deepening questions to help the other person reflect more deeply and further guide them.

We soon realized that these three things are really skills that a problem solver also needs, even if they don't coach anybody else. In the Coaching Dojo, when playing the role of the coach, it really comes to the edge and they have to quickly develop a much deeper understanding, just to be able to run the exercise.

Of course, people feel uncomfortable far away outside their comfort zone. They struggle with understanding what to do, how to do it and often also fear to role play. However, with skilled facilitation and a friendly atmosphere, step by step people start to practice. Observing their increasing skill level and insights after just a few hours of practice is fantastic.

It is not that we haven't talked about and also practiced these things in the A3 training. But, in the role of the coach you are forced to think and lead the dialogue. The need for a reference becomes apparent and the feeling of missing it is uncomfortably strong. This gives participants a deeper insight quickly.

We could see is that they start to "*coach themselves*" through self-reflections and that the quality of problem-solving improves. By the way, going back to the initial purpose, everyone was more open to coaching and the resistance was gone.

To see people grow is amazing and motivating. The Coaching Dojo is a great training set-up that can be adapted and used in many different situations far beyond the A3.