



New Zealand Lean Academy

# A3 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

## E BOOK GUIDE

### A NEW ZEALAND LEAN ACADEMY RESOURCE

This resource was developed by Kate Horton & Rob Bull  
of the New Zealand Lean Academy.  
There are more resources available at [www.nzla.nz](http://www.nzla.nz)



# WELCOME MESSAGE

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## **Rob Bull & Kate Horton**

Directors of the New Zealand Lean Academy

Hi there,

Thanks for downloading and using our resources. We have put these together and made them as accessible as possible to our clients and the wider business community as a part of the New Zealand Lean Academy.

Please use them to inspire your Lean journey as you build a team and business that embraces Lean and continuous improvement. Use these resources internally as a base for training, etc., or get in touch with us to purchase editable templates to align these tools with your own brand's look & feel.

Thanks and happy improving! Rob & Kate.





# ABOUT A3 IMPROVEMENT PLANS

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It won't be breaking news to you that effective project management is crucial for team success. Yet, even the most sensational teams can struggle to organise and communicate their plans effectively, leading to unclear outcomes and a scattered approach.

**This is where the A3 Improvement Plan comes into play, offering a standardised and methodical framework to guide teams through the project planning process.**

At its core, the A3 Improvement Plan allows teams to approach challenges in a more organised way, from problem identification to solution implementation. With its data-driven and structured flow, the A3 template gets team members to map out rock-solid steps that deliver significant business impact.

Like a lot of the tools that we use in the Lean Thinking world, they didn't push the boat out too far when coming up with a name for this one! It's exactly what it says on the tin, a single A3 page that serves as the central hub for a project's overarching story. You can add more materials as needed, but the A3 Plan remains the focal point for tracking progress and ensuring alignment across your team.

When you've got multiple stakeholders or complex tasks, the A3 Improvement Plan truly shines. By boosting collaboration and clearing up communication, it helps teams navigate project details and maintain focus on key objectives.

**With an A3 Improvement Plan on the go, your team will be fully equipped to turn ideas into plans, and plans into results.**

# THE STEPS OF A3 PLANNING


The A3 Improvement Plan is a systematic, six-step approach that follows the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle, also known as the Deming Cycle.

Each step builds upon the previous one to create a comprehensive plan that can take weeks or even months to complete, depending on the complexity of the problem and data collection needs.

To get started on the A3 journey, **the first step** is to establish consensus among the team on the need for the A3 Improvement process. This stage involves identifying the key problem, determining the individuals who should be involved, and designating a primary owner of the A3 Plan.

Once the foundation is set, the next 5 stages involve methodically working through each step of the A3. The process may include collecting and analysing background data over an extended period, such as measuring the number of errors per week for several months to identify trends.

[There's a printable version of this for you on page 9:](#)

<b>A3 Owner/s:</b>	<b>Area:</b>	 New Zealand Lean Academy
	<b>Project Name:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>		
<b>1. Description of current State?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are we trying to solve</li><li>• What is the gap between ideal &amp; actual</li></ul>	<b>4. Implementation Plan</b> Who / What / When Countermeasure of the root cause analysis	
<b>2. Background Data</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diagram or process (attach if needed)</li><li>• Graphs</li><li>• Measures, facts etc</li></ul>		
<b>3. Root Cause Analysis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5 Whys</li><li>• Fishbone</li></ul>	<b>5. Results - follow up &amp; standardise</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Actual results - compare to predicted</li><li>• Checks - who, when? Any follow up required?</li><li>• Set SOPs</li></ul>	

## A3 Problem Solving

An A3 is a one-page report that follows PDCA thinking as applied to collaborative problem solving & strategy development. The A3 includes the background, problem statement, analysis, proposed actions, and the expected results.



# KEY POINTS TO PONDER BEFORE YOU START

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## **Clearly Define the Problem:**

Invest plenty of time in getting clear on the actual problem. This may require multiple iterations, but it's crucial that all team members have a shared understanding of the issue before proceeding. **A well-defined problem statement sets the foundation for the entire A3 Plan.**

## **Set a Schedule:**

Establish regular times and dates for improvement meetings where the project team get together to review progress, and ensure accountability for actions. As with anything in business, **consistency with your communication is vital** for maintaining momentum and ensuring all members are aligned on the plan's development.

## **Maintain Visibility:**

Keep the project visible and transparent to encourage collaboration and drive a culture of improvement across your business. Sharing the A3 Plan with other teams might reveal similar challenges they are facing or opportunities for team members to take on new levels of challenge.

## **Secure Leadership Support:**

Make sure that you and any other leaders are on board with the improvement plan to ensure strategic alignment and provide guidance when necessary. A Lean Leader should be aware of the project's progress and be available to address questions or make decisions.

## **Regularly Update Stakeholders:**

Keep everyone in the loop with the project's developments, including updates at stand-up meetings. Make sure the team's progress is shared along the way and celebrate milestones to maintain their engagement and motivation.

## **Encourage Ownership:**

Encourage team members to take ownership of the A3 Plan and the improvement process. A sense of personal responsibility contributes to the plan's success and empowers individuals to drive positive change.

# GETTING YOUR A3 STARTED

Lean Thinking is all about valuing people, so let's start with them. Begin the A3 planning process by **identifying the project owner** and **assembling a dream team** to lead the improvement plan. This group will play a critical role in guiding the project from problem definition to successful implementation.

## Organise an Initial Meeting:

Set up a session with the project team to clearly define the problem that necessitates investigation: the Problem Statement. A well-crafted problem statement serves as the foundation for the entire A3 Plan, so take your time to ensure consensus and understanding among team members.

A great problem statement for an A3 plan is **clear, concise, and focused on a specific issue**. It should provide enough detail to guide the improvement process without being overly complex.

Here's an example of a problem statement that meets these criteria:

## Problem Statement Example:

The average time to process customer orders in our online store has increased from 2.5 days in Q4 2024 to 4.1 days in Q1 2025, resulting in customer dissatisfaction and an 8% decrease in sales during this period.

This problem statement is effective because it:

1. **Clearly defines the issue:** The increasing time to process customer orders in the online store.
2. **Provides context with relevant data:** Comparing the average processing times between Q4 2024 and Q1 2025.
3. **Highlights the consequences:** Increased customer dissatisfaction and a decline in sales.

By presenting the problem in this manner, the project team can focus on understanding the root causes behind the increased order processing time and develop targeted countermeasures to improve efficiency and customer satisfaction.



# GETTING YOUR A3 STARTED

## **Gather Relevant Data:**

Create a plan to collect the necessary data and information, a process that may take days or even months, depending on the complexity of the problem. Be sure to explore a variety of sources, including historical data, customer feedback, and interviews with team members, to build a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand.

## **Analyse Information:**

Examine the collected data, using relevant root cause analysis tools like Ishikawa diagrams or the 5 Whys method. Document the results and attach them to the A3 Improvement Plan to provide a clear record of your findings.

## **Identify Issues and Countermeasures:**

Based on the analysis, the project team should identify agreed-upon issues and their causes. Next, determine the appropriate countermeasures or actions needed to address these issues, which may require additional planning documents to sequence and prioritise tasks. Keep in mind that actions may range from simple, immediate solutions to more complex initiatives requiring investment and leadership approval.

## **Define Success:**

If you haven't already, now is the time to establish what success looks like based on the data and knowledge gained. Determine the desired outcome and how you will measure or demonstrate progress, setting clear goals to guide the implementation process.

## **Implement and Monitor:**

Proceed with completing the agreed-upon actions, closely monitoring progress and adjusting the plan as needed. Maintain open communication and regularly update stakeholders on the project's status.



# EVALUATE YOUR A3 PLAN

Once your team has implemented the A3 plan and monitored its progress, it's essential to evaluate its effectiveness to ensure the desired outcomes have been achieved. This evaluation process helps to identify areas for further improvement, and it reinforces the continuous learning culture that Lean Thinking is all about.

1. **Review the Problem Statement:** Begin by revisiting the problem statement to confirm that the actions taken have directly addressed the initial concerns. If the issue has been resolved, celebrate this success with your team.
2. **Analyse Results:** Examine the data gathered during the implementation phase and compare it to the success criteria defined earlier in the process. This comparison will provide insights into whether the A3 plan has achieved its desired impact.
3. **Evaluate Process Efficiency:** Reflect on the efficiency of the planning and implementation processes. Consider the time and resources required and identify any bottlenecks or obstacles encountered along the way.
4. **Gather Feedback:** Collect input from team members, stakeholders, and customers to understand the plan's perceived effectiveness. These perspectives can highlight additional strengths and weaknesses that may not be immediately apparent through data analysis alone.
5. **Identify Learnings:** Extract valuable lessons from the entire A3 planning process, focusing on aspects that can be applied to future improvement initiatives.
6. **Adjust and Adapt:** Use the insights gained from the evaluation process to refine the A3 plan or develop new approaches for addressing similar issues in the future.

Like many other tools that we're sharing with you in the New Zealand Lean Academy, continuous evaluation is an integral part of the A3 planning process. By regularly assessing the effectiveness of your plan and learning from the experience, you'll build a culture of continuous improvement that contributes to long-term success and the growth of your business and people.





A3 Owner/s:

Area:

Project Name:

Date:

### 1. Description of current State?

- What are we trying to solve
- What is the gap between ideal & actual

### 2. Background Data

- Diagram or process (attach if needed)
- Graphs
- Measures, facts etc

### 3. Root Cause Analysis

- 5 whys
- Fishbone

### 4. Implementation Plan

Who / What / When

Countermeasure of the root cause analysis

### 5. Results - follow up & standardise

- Actual results - compare to predicted
- Checks - who, when? Any follow up required?
- Set SOPs

# A3 Problem Solving

An A3 is a one-page report that follows PDCA thinking as applied to collaborative problem solving & strategy development. The A3 includes the background, problem statement, analysis, proposed actions, and the expected results.

# FINAL THOUGHTS

We hope you'll give A3 planning a go. Ultimately, it's one more piece of the puzzle that allows you to achieve a culture of continuous learning and improvement. While Lean Thinking tools like this originated in manufacturing, they can add massive value to service-based industries, hospitality, retail, finance... you get the picture.

Have a crack, and remember that we're just an email away if you've got any questions.



## YOU'LL LOVE THESE RESOURCES TOO:

- [Five Whys](#)
- [Leader Standard Work](#)

## GET IN TOUCH:

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