



# Does size matter for pilot projects?

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One question that I get asked a lot is about how big a pilot project should be. Here are some rules to help you navigate these waters.

## If you're just starting your Lean journey...

Be very mindful of biting off more than you can chew! Keep the pilots down to a manageable size and then make them a bit smaller. Remember, you don't want to complicate things and you do want your people to experience success.

Lean isn't rocket science. It's about getting people to the gemba, to get the three reals: the real facts, the real place and the real problem. Get this idea into their heads first. You won't be having them do an A3, but what they're doing should still

involve some critical thinking and some A3 thinking.

And remember that using the PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) or A3 as a pilot will let you check out the changes before wholesale implementation and it will give everyone the chance to see if the proposed changes will work. Once they see that the ideas worked, they'll be more willing to try the next one.

## If you've at an intermediate level...

Let's say your people have several PDSAs or A3s under their belts. They've done some value stream mapping and you're feeling pretty good about your team's level of proficiency. Make their pilot follow a simple A3—introduce some root cause problem solving, some critical thinking and some A3 processes and thinking.

Think about having a moderate pilot, with more than one person acting on it. Ensure that they're measuring pre- and post-intervention, that they're following up and auditing their success and ensure that the accountability loop has been closed.

## If you've at an advanced level...

Think about having a pilot that will involve both critical thinking and root cause problem solving and be a full-fledged A3. It might take some time to represent the problem you're having on one A3 (11" by 17") sheet. I like to think that there are three levels of a problem:

- **Level C**—Causes are clear and immediate actions can be taken.
- **Level B**—Causes may not be known and there is medium impact from the problem.
- **Level A**—Again, causes may not be known but there is high impact from the problem.

Level C problems can be taken care of with

a very simple pilot using a very simple "just do it." You still want to ensure that you're treating a root cause and not a symptom, so you'll apply some rudimentary problem solving or root cause analysis.

Level B problems require A3 thinking and more in-depth root cause problem solving because it's not that clear why there's a problem. Apply root cause thinking and A3. By definition, the pilot will be bigger.

For Level A problems, with their high impact, you've really got to search for the actionable root cause and really do an A3 well. The causes may not be known, so you'll have to dig deeper. The pilot will be the largest for these problems but you've probably got many successes under your belt. 🍁

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## Question from the floor...

**QUESTION:** I've got a team that's doing a value stream mapping. It's their first time doing something like this. It all went well until just after they identified their actionable root causes. I say this because they did a good job of identifying what they needed to change, but when it comes to actually addressing the change, they're stuck! Any help?

**ANSWER:** You've partially identified an answer. It's their first time. You shouldn't expect them to "get it" all on their first time. I know that many people do get it on the first crack, but typically this is after they've already had some Lean training. You didn't mention whether or not they had any previous Lean exposure, so I'll assume that they have not.

I'll assume that you've got a "worst case" scenario—people that have been in their jobs for a long time, they don't have standard work and they think that they've been doing a good job.

I generally don't push things too much in a value stream mapping exercise—it's best if they can be pointed in the right direction, rather than pulled. But when this Socratic method doesn't work and they fall back to old habits, I will draw them a line (after I've made sure that I'm not jumping the gun).

## From the bookshelf...

### American Icon by Bryce G. Hoffman

I like this book because: 1) It was a very good read. It gave "fly on the wall" accounts of Alan Mulally negotiating deals and Ford overcoming challenges from the inside and outside. But I also liked it because: 2) It made it very clear that Mulally earned his stripes when he was with Boeing and his visits to Toyota in that capacity.

Mulally and his team pulled off one of the greatest comebacks in business history. As the rest of Detroit tottered towards collapse, Ford went from the brink of bankruptcy to being one of the most profitable automakers in the world. It brought over cars from Europe and the U.K., consolidated efforts in North America and generally got its act together.

American Icon is compelling. On the verge

of collapse, Ford did two things. One, the company encouraged employees to do better and then it went outside the auto industry and recruited Mulally to lead a sweeping restructuring of the company.

Mulally had already saved Boeing from the deathblow of 9/11 and he was able to overcome decades of mismanagement and denial. Mulally applied the principles he learned at Toyota and developed at Boeing to streamline Ford's inefficient operations, force its fractious executives to work together as a team and spark a product renaissance in Dearborn.

