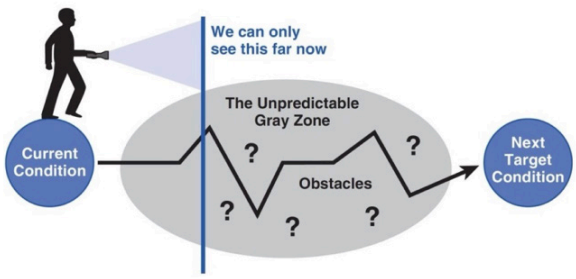
WHY DOES TOYOTA KATA MATTER? WHAT IS IT?

A way of developing the systematic pursuit of desired conditions by utilising human capabilities in a concerted way.

Most companies are lead, managed and populated by thoughtful, hardworking people who want their team, their organisation, to succeed. So what is it that makes organisations fall behind and sometimes fail? The conclusion is it's not the people but rather the *prevailing management system* within which we work that is the culprit. We need a more effective way of leading and managing people, and of ensuring our organisations find their way into the future. Through an initially structured pathway provided by the Toyota Kata patterns, the combination of *scientific thinking and deliberate practice* drives a cycle of "Think, Do, Learn" to meet business goals.

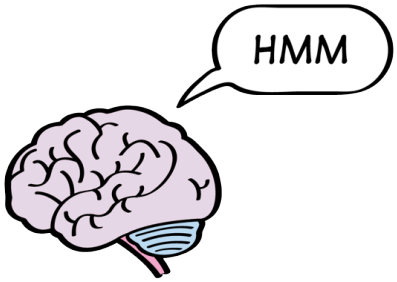
(Adapted from Toyota Kata, McGraw Hill, 2009).

Mike Rother quotes that oftentimes we 'breathe our own exhaust'. In other words, we are wasting time, or worse, reducing our chances of moving forward. He is implying we have gone beyond what we actually know to be true, beyond the facts and data available to us, we are speculating on the outcome of doing a, b or c and so on. The only way to move forward, see further with our flashlight, is to take a step in the intended direction – think scientifically by designing and conducting an experiment. Our experiment will take us forward toward our desired state. We will see further, we'll maybe see things we didn't expect, we'll learn what to do next.



(Source: Toyota Kata Practice Guide. McGraw Hill, 2018.)

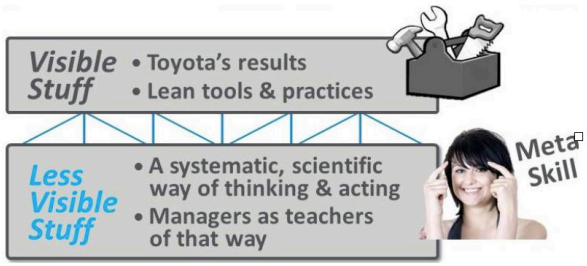
Scientific thinking is not new.



In 1957 Shigeo Shingo introduced 'Scientific Thinking Mechanism for production improvements into Toyota. (Reference – The 7 Kata: Toyota Kata, TWI, and Lean Training by Conrad Soltero, Patrice Boutier.)

One of Taylors Principles of Scientific Management specifically mentions applying a scientific method to improvement. (Noted, 'scientific method' is different to 'scientific thinking' but there is a similar pattern.)

Rother, when researching Toyota's management system in the early 2000's, did not locate two katas. What he did identify was two patterns sitting under and supporting the tools, the things we'd been seeing for years. One was a scientific pattern for improvement; the second was a pattern of leaders coaching such that people learnt to use the first pattern first deliberately, then innately.



(Source: Toyota Kata Practice Guide. McGraw Hill, 2018.)

Rother often states that simply explaining a model to people, for example a model for improvement, doesn't change behaviour. There are very good neural reasons for this.

In order to give context to the two patterns sitting under and supporting the tools, and to give us a way of deliberate practice (which will change behaviour), Rother identified two katas – an improvement kata and a coaching kata.

The improvement kata has four steps:

1. Understand direction.
2. Be clear on the current condition.
3. Establish a (next) target condition.
4. Experiment toward the target condition.

There are essentially five questions in the coaching kata along with a backward looking reflection after the second question:

1. What is the target condition?
2. What is the actual condition now?

   Reflect over the last step

3. What obstacles are now stopping you from meeting the target condition? Which one will you work on now?
4. Given our learning, what is your next step?
5. How quickly can we go and see what we have learned from this?

Combining these two practice patterns in the workplace daily will lead to scientifically thinking people who will be capable of continually improving their processes effectively and efficiently.