

# The 3P Academy – Getting Busy People Fixing Tough Problems

## The Problem-Solvers' Guide to Getting it Fixed

Why do so many problems hide, seemingly un-noticed, in plain sight? And why are there so many false starts and failed fixes for the problems which we do try to tackle?

**Deloitte research revealed that a staggering 81% of improvement programmes fail to meet their targets.**

That's a lot of effort and potential getting wasted. In distilling over 30 years' experience into this step-by-step guide, it's my hope to uncover the most common failings, and get more organisations doing what works - equipping you to solve more of your own and your organisations' problems, for good.

Traditional problem-solving assumes that we're logical – that a solid business case and addressing the cause-effect will secure a solution. But when you add people to the mix, it's rarely that simple. This straightforward 7-step method is designed to embed real-world problem-solving, combining the best of Lean and Six Sigma process improvement with the latest in behavioural science. Because with the right know-how, replacing the sticking-plasters with real solutions doesn't have to be hard work.

### Problem or Opportunity?

I've worked with organisations who banned the word problem – they had to be described as opportunities. The intention might be to change the energy, fostering curiosity and creativity rather than passive acceptance. But the reality is simply to fuel cynicism, scepticism and contempt.

Changing attitudes, mindsets and behaviours needs more than changing the words. In this guide, I'll equip you to change all of those and more. But for now, let's agree to call a spade a spade.

Solving a problem or realising an opportunity both represent closing a performance gap. For a problem, it's usually that performance is falling short of what's acceptable. For an opportunity, things might be doing OK, but we recognise that they can be better.



The tools and approaches are similar for both. So for simplicity, I'll refer to all of those gaps we're striving to close as problems, whichever side of acceptable they lie on. If you prefer to call some of your own gaps opportunities, then of course, you're completely free to choose your own words.

## How did this Unique Problem-Solving Model Come About?

During my career so far, I've worked at both ends of the World Class spectrum. I started out as an Engineer, leading very technical projects in a genuinely World Class - our strategy, systems and culture made breakthrough change relatively straightforward. At the time I thought that was normal... On moving to my next role, I quickly discovered that it wasn't.

I spent the next 10 years embedding continuous improvement from scratch within two global medical organisations, more than doubling productivity in both, and delivering many £millions worth of efficiency savings and increased revenue. Both programmes started out in a culture of chaotic firefighting, so it was a long, steady path to creating the infrastructure and best-practices which you need for sustained improvement.

I've also trained over 1,000 people in Lean-Sigma methods, and how to create a culture of continuous improvement within their own organisations. Which has given me wide-ranging insight into the most common reasons that problems don't get fixed, and ultimately, how best to make sure that they do.

This unique model emerged from that real-world experience of a vast array of different types of problems, in sectors as diverse as manufacturing, financial services, defence and the NHS. Because the common factor running through every organisation (and many problems) is people. No matter how many tools and techniques you have at your disposal, if you don't get people engaged, involved and even excited about what you're doing, then your attempts to solve problems will flounder.

So as we explore the 7 steps of effective problem solving, we'll uncover powerful strategies for delivering high performance, through both people and process.

## The 7 Steps of Effective Problem-Solving

Before we dive deeper into each of the steps and how to use them, here's a brief introduction.



### Step 1 Become Aware there's a Problem

Lack of awareness could result from apathy, denial or inertia. Sometimes it's as simple as 'it's always been this way', and no one's made the time or headspace to question it. In this section, we'll also explore how the human brain's desire to be energy efficient can cause problems to go unrecognised.



### Step 2 Understand the Problem and its Context

Of all the steps, this is probably the most commonly neglected. How often do we go straight to solutions, without really investigating? So in this step we'll explore some quick and powerful ways to make sure that you solve the real problem, in the best way possible.



### **Step 3** Identify and Confirm the Causes

This is another area where assumptions can prevail, and decisions are often made based on gut feel rather than data. But beware the desire to tackle problems quickly rather than well. In this step we'll explore some straightforward ways to establish root cause, so that instead of applying more sticking plasters, you can solve more of your problems for good.

### **Step 4** Choose and Plan Your Solution

This is where you generate ideas and consider your options for how best to solve the problem, really understanding the wider implications.... Making sure that your solution is a good fit with the problem's context, and free from accidental side-effects.

### **Step 5** Implement Your Solution

From this point on, the effort you've invested in the earlier stages starts to bear fruit. With the right foundations in place, implementation gets a lot more straightforward. Here's where we make our very first changes, often including small-scale experiments or piloting and evaluation, enabling you to optimise your solution before rolling to the wider population.

### **Step 6** Optimise and Embed

Is where you fine-tune solutions for the best possible outcomes, and roll out new ways of working to everyone. In this step, we'll explore how to overcome the most common reasons why people resist change, and ensure that the improvements really stick once handed back to business as usual.

### **Step 7** Spread the Learning and Celebrate

How often do you leap straight into solving the next problem without a pause? So in this step, we'll explore the importance and benefits of working out where else your solution might work, and using your achievements to build momentum for what's next.

As we explore each of the steps, you may have a live problem which you want to work through. Or you may prefer to get to grips with the whole approach before choosing which problem to tackle first. We'll introduce hands-on techniques to use for yourself and with colleagues, to start generating lasting results.

So let's get started....

## Step 1 Become Aware there's a Problem

When I first start working with an organisation, it's often surprising how many substantial problems have been hiding in plain sight. Sometimes everyone's just assumed that because it's always been like that, there's no other way... Or it's half-seen, but the effects aren't clear enough to prompt taking action. So layer upon layer of coping strategies get added, becoming a massive drain on available resources.

There are a few common reasons why this happens, and the first has its origins way back in the evolution of the human brain....

### The Human Brain

To illustrate, I'd like you to imagine that you're sitting in a waiting room, and coming through some speakers, there's an uncomfortably loud noise. Would you try to switch it off? Pennsylvania University researchers subjected their participants to loud noise. Some were shown how to turn it off – so they did. Others just had to put up with it.

They each got a second round of noise, which they had to work out for themselves how to turn off. Do you think they did?



Those who'd previously turned it off, quickly found the new way of doing it, again relieving themselves of the discomfort. But many of those who'd previously had to put up with the noise also did the same again. They didn't even look for a way to turn it off.

Psychologists call this learned helplessness – but I prefer to think of it as the brain going into efficiency mode. Solving problems uses a lot of energy, and our brains have evolved to be energy efficient. So if you experience a problem or challenge similar to ones you couldn't previously solve, rather than wasting energy trying, efficiency mode kicks in.

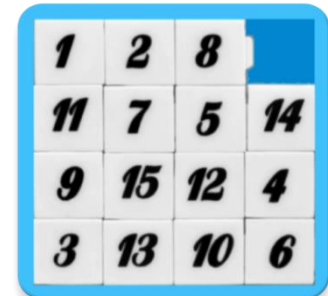
It's not something you decide consciously, it happens all by itself. So the more problems you're experiencing which you can't do anything about, the more you'll miss seeing the potential solutions for the ones which you could.

But stopping this efficiency mode is really straightforward. Just keep taking action, on any problems – and encourage those around you to do the same. Even if they're not the biggest, messiest or most disruptive issues. Even if the actions you're taking, in themselves, don't make that much difference. Because by keeping your mind out of efficiency mode, keeping your creative thinking and problem-solving switched on, you'll keep noticing actions you could take on other problems. And that makes a massive difference.

## Somebody Else's Problem

Another reason why a problem might hang around without anyone trying to fix it, is that the person who could is not the one feeling the effects - the problem awareness is in the wrong place. Shortly after moving into a brand new factory, our corridors filled up with pallets of materials.

Every time the next material was needed, our team would have to move several other pallets out of the way to get it, which was destroying our efficiency. It was like one of those kids' toys where you have to arrange all the squares in order, but there's only one space to move everything in and out of.



The solution required changing the way we planned our materials. The planning team came to see the problem, and agreed it was a fairly easy fix. But nothing happened. Rinse and repeat, several times...

Through sheer frustration, I tried a new tactic. For a couple of days, we counted our pallet moves. Multiply this by the typical time each move took, and the salary of the people moving them, and we very quickly worked out that the monthly labour cost was heading into the £thousands. I created a mock invoice, and left it on the Planning Manager's desk. "What's this?" he said. "The monthly cost of the pallet moves that your team know how to fix, but haven't yet. I know it's not your budget it's coming off, but just imagine it was...."

A week later, our corridors were clear. Seeing the overall cost in black and white, even if it wasn't the planning budget being impacted, was enough to change the behaviours. It's what authors Chip and Dan Heath call 'making it concrete'. So if you've a problem that's been lurking around for a while, which you need someone else to fix, how can you make it concrete? Make it something they can touch, or hold, or experience for themselves.... Because unfortunately, abstract numbers on a spreadsheet, or a problem description which doesn't include the cash impact, often aren't enough.

This example's from manufacturing, and you might not work in a factory. But it's not about the specifics of place or problem. It's about the people, and those are pretty similar wherever you go. So might you have some problems going unnoticed too?

- Get people taking action, to bring the brains out of efficiency mode
- And make it concrete



How do you create a culture of high performance when everyone's already busy? Time is one of the most limited resources in most businesses. So our tailored Performance Programmes introduce the most effective way for your front-line teams to start identifying and prioritising their own day-to-day problems. Because getting rid of the sticking plasters and work-arounds for some of the smaller problems, creates the time and head-space to start tackling the bigger ones.



## Step 2 Understand the Problem and its Context

It's amazing how often this step is neglected, in the quest for speed rather than a quality solution. Most of the changes which I've seen fail completely, or deliver patchy results, have resulted from this step being skipped. This step takes time – done well, only a small amount of time, and it will pay back that investment many times over. Because that little bit of extra thought helps you to fix the real problem (rather than someone's perception of it), and fix it in the most effective way possible.

As an example of skipping this step, I was asked to deliver a project to non-stick coat our tools. We made many different shapes and sizes of ostomy products (worn by patients after some abdominal surgeries), each of which had its own tools. I was given 8 months and over a £250K budget – and I'm not used to spending money. But what was making me even more nervous was the risk. Because non-stick is great until it gets damaged. You might have experienced this with your pans at home.

Damaged tool coatings carried high risk of us making product which looked fine, but which would leak. And if you're an ostomy patient, one thing you do not want your bag to do, is leak. So I asked why they wanted the tools coating.

It was not well received. Brand new to my role, the expectation was for me to do as I was told. But I carried on asking. It took 2 weeks to finally get a straight answer. Sales were growing faster than expected, and production couldn't keep up. Coating the tools was one way to speed up the production process to meet the growing demand. So now I knew what we were trying to fix – speed up the lines.

I got stuck into discussing it with the front line teams. Coatings would have delivered around an 8% speed increase, in 8 months, at great cost and with high risk. By implementing many of the production team's ideas, within two weeks we'd delivered a 12% speed increase, with no cost and no risk. We didn't even have a meeting.

**So please, if you take nothing else from this guide, NEVER start with a solution fixed in your mind.**

Until you really get to grips with the problem, it's impossible to be sure you've got the best solution.



So here's a straightforward way to get to grips with the problem....

It's called 5Ws and 1H

And despite what you might read elsewhere, the Ws are all the question words EXCEPT for Why. Why belongs in the next step.

So we're investigating What, Which, When, Where, Who, and finally How

Exploring each question to get clear on what the problem is and isn't, gives us a thorough understanding of the presenting symptoms. Which is a huge leap towards then understanding, and resolving, the causes. Let's walk through an example exploring customer complaints.

**What** are customers complaining about? There's a mix, but we've seen a gradual increase in complaints relating to late deliveries.

**Which** products or services are they complaining about? If it's some and not others, we can rule out any possible root causes which would equally affect all.

**When** did we start to see the increase? This might help us identify (and reverse) what's changed.

**Where** in this example might be where in the process are delays happening. In others, it might be where on the paperwork are errors being made, or where in the system is information going missing.

**Who** in this example might be who's complaining (and who's not) – are we treating some customers differently, or do they have differing expectations which are contributing to the problem?

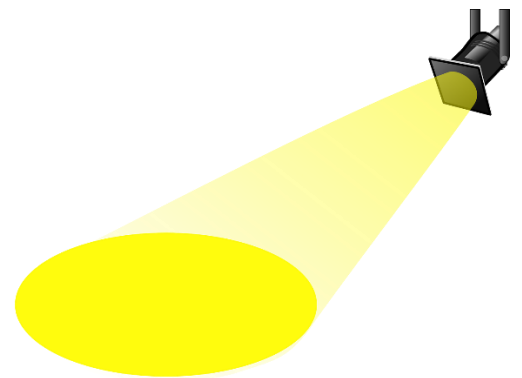
And finally, **How** is not how did the problem happen – we'll get on to that in the next step. It might be how is it being detected, or how is the issue affecting the customers.

Some of the questions will be easier to answer than others. Some symptoms don't fit neatly under one question. Sometimes, you'll have to get more data or information to inform your answer. And sometimes, you'll emerge with no new understanding. But sometimes, you will – and it's those times when that little extra effort can save you weeks of accidentally working on the wrong thing.

So I strongly encourage you, before you go hurtling towards solutions, to take a few minutes to run your problem through 5Ws and 1H... To encourage colleagues to do the same, share a few examples where the answers have led to a different solution than the one you'd have instinctively chosen. Because once you've experienced the power of this simple technique, you'll never leap straight to solutions.

### Finding the Bright Spots

By getting clear on what the problem is and isn't, as well as smoothing your path to the real root cause, you might also find some bright spots. Because very often, where the problem isn't, is where the solution is. If one team's work is generating much lower customer complaints than another's, what are they doing differently? Do they have some best practices which can be shared, leading you to an effective solution far faster than creating one from scratch...?



As problem solvers, we're naturally drawn to the problem, so it can sometimes take deliberate effort to focus attention on where it isn't. But it too, can potentially save you weeks.



This step is powerful, so in our Performance Programmes, we dive even deeper into understanding both what the problem is, and why it matters.

We explore re-framing to make sure we're focusing on the real problem. We learn the basics of using data to challenge assumptions. And we set out how to create both a compelling business case, and emotional commitment across every level of the organisation - setting ourselves up to steer clear of shifting priorities, and bypass many of the later behavioural barriers to implementing a long-term solution.



## Step 3

### Identify and Confirm the Causes

How often do we just recover from a problem, rather than finding and addressing its cause? For example, if a customer gets in touch about a late order, we expedite it to them. But if that's all we do, then the same thing will keep on happening, and we'll have to keep on expediting orders (and giving our customers a poor experience). Only by understanding how it got to be late, and changing the process to remove that cause, do we stop the same problems from happening over and over again.

The more problems which keep re-occurring, the more time and energy are needed to keep on recovering from them. That exact same time and energy which are in such short supply, for driving those breakthrough performance results. So pretty much the only way to break out of that reactive firefighting, is to start resolving some of those problems at the root.

BUT before we dive into how to do that, what type of problem are you trying to solve? If it's a process problem, then understanding and addressing why it happened is crucial. If it's a people problem, root cause might be far less useful, and might even reinforce the problem.

For example, if one of your team has a crippling fear of delivering any kind of presentation, pinpointing why they're scared isn't going to help.... During a starring role in the school nativity, aged 7, they fluffed their lines and got laughed at. That embarrassment feels like it's seared into their soul, and pinpointing that event as the source of their discomfort only makes it worse. Knowing why is useful only when the root cause is something you can change.



By the way, if you do have anyone in your team suffering from presentation anxiety, it's something I've helped many people to overcome, often in less than an hour (without ever asking why)...

It's in solving process problems that 'Why?' comes into its own. We keep on asking 'why' until we find a cause, which we can take action to remove. Let's have a look at a household example (my daughter is a rich source of potential process improvements!).





So far, we've not run out again....

Be aware, though. Just because you ask 'why', doesn't guarantee that you'll find an answer. We routinely used this 'Why' analysis to investigate every medical product non-conformance. Well over half the time, with the information available to us after the event, we couldn't identify a cause. But if you don't ask, you definitely won't find one.

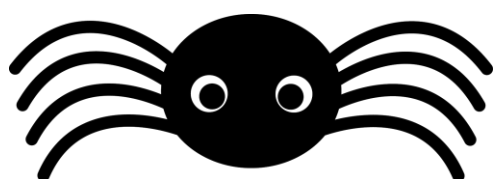
The second thing to be aware of, is that you might identify a root cause which it's either impossible / impractical, or you're not allowed to address. One of my trainees worked for a national maintenance company. He'd been tasked with stopping the over-running contracts, for which they were receiving large fines. They'd investigated why maintenance jobs were taking longer than scheduled, and one of the most significant reasons was that their newly hired Engineers didn't have the right technical skills.



They'd presented compelling evidence to the senior leadership team, asking to update their recruitment criteria. And they'd been told 'No'... So the whole project had ground to a halt. It's really frustrating to find a clear root cause, then not be allowed to address it. But if that happens, you've got switch to reducing its effects.

It took some persuasion, but they eventually extended the on-boarding training, to fill those crucial skill gaps sooner. And they changed the way that people were allocated to contracts, so that newer Engineers were paired with someone more experienced. It made scheduling more complicated, but that was better for the business than huge fines and a poor reputation. You don't have to limit yourself to a single solution.

### 5Whys for Chronic Problems

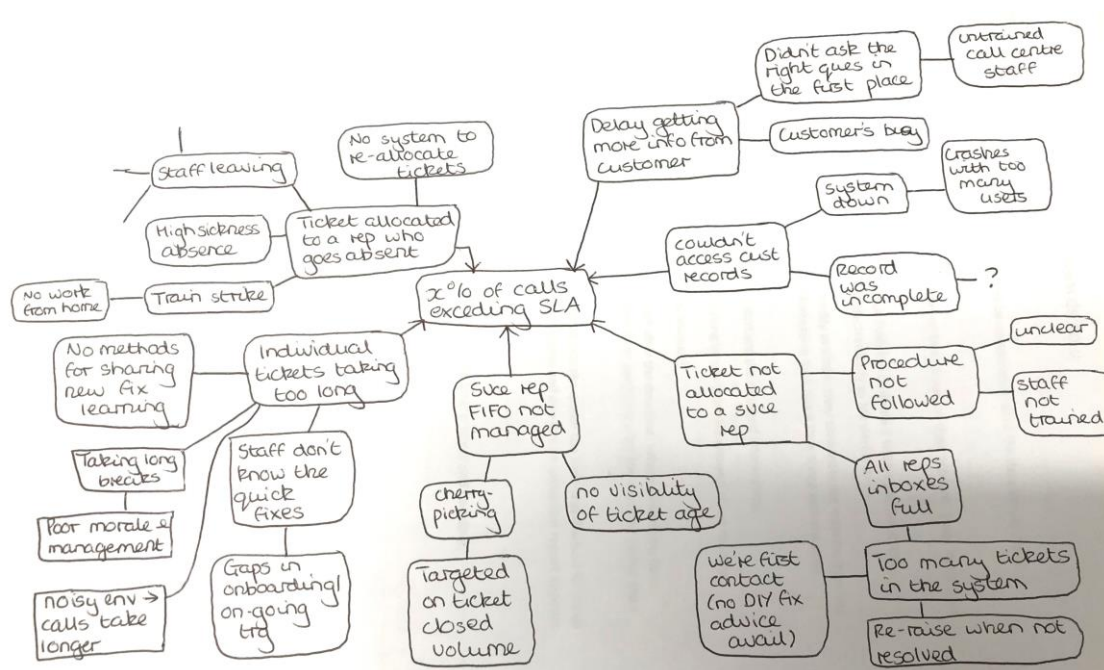


Our examples so far have had only one answer to each 'why' – and that will be the case when you have a single event of a problem to investigate. But many of the problems we'll be fixing don't only happen once, they keep on happening. And the causes might be different every time. So in that case, my favourite tool is a spider diagram.

It looks a bit like a mind map, and it's generated by getting together a group of around 8 people, who know the process well enough to be able to make an educated go of answering the 'whys'. Start by writing the problem statement in the middle of a whiteboard – you can do this just as well in person or virtually. At this stage, you're capturing the possible causes. Verifying which are actually happening can come later.

Develop one leg of the spider at a time - keep on asking why, until you get to a something that you can action. Then go one why back, and ask why else. Once you've answered all the whys for one leg, go right back to the central problem statement, and start a new one.

Here's a worked example exploring why a help desk isn't responding to customer requests within the agreed timeframe (the SLA). The full version would have many more legs than this – for the illustration, I stopped when I reached the edges of my piece of paper.



Once you've captured the whys, what actions you can take to prevent the cause at the end of each leg? If removing those root causes requires significant investment (of time or cash), then get data on how often they're happening and how big an impact they're having, to quantify your return on investment. But if the fixes are relatively quick and easy, do them anyway. You don't always have to quantify the effects of individual causes before fixing them.

The first time I used this, our problem was poor stock accuracy. There was a legal requirement for the system records to be at least 95% in agreement with what was physically on the shelves. We were running at 68%, which meant that every time we did a full stock-take, we had to write off up to £300K of material which the system thought was there, but wasn't.

One obvious potential cause was theft – but these materials were of no use to anyone outside the business, so that could be ruled out. New to the organisation, I started by getting to know the area....

Piecing together who's who, and getting to grips with their processes. I'd introduce myself, and explain what I'd been asked to deliver. And the response was almost identical every time...

"Oh no, what are they making that a project for? We've been telling them the answer for months – just lock that door", and they'd point to the door which led to the production area. Everyone was in complete agreement that locking production people out of the warehouse would fix the problem.



I did see production people coming and helping themselves to stock, but I also saw them taking off the system before they left. So that wasn't the problem. I saw a lot of other things which were, but no one else was noticing those. Because when you think you know the answer, you stop looking for anything else. Especially when 'they' (the management) are ignoring the answer you've been telling them for months.

I had to tread carefully. Just presenting them with what I'd observed would have been basically saying 'you're wrong, and I know better'. Not a great way to get buy-in.

So I arranged a spider brainstorm, and bribed people to join in with some really nice biscuits – never under-estimate the persuasive powers of food. With some careful facilitation (and a few very leading questions), the ideas started to flow. Within six weeks, our stock accuracy was up to 98%, and it stayed there. It didn't even need any money spending on it. The problem which had persisted for years, got fixed from a single meeting.



Data is the most powerful tool for cutting through the fog of hearsay and assumptions. So in this section of our Performance Programmes, we equip your change leaders to use data well, exploring both graphical and statistical methods. Because well-chosen data can avoid weeks lost to working on the wrong thing.

We delve into other brainstorming methods, and the skills for successful facilitation, for drawing out the collective knowledge to inform good decisions. And we explore some powerful skills for solving the non-process problems – the ones where 'why' doesn't help.

## **Step 4** Choose and Plan Your Solution

Let's finally take the brakes off exploring solutions, and get stuck into solving your problem. From this step forwards, the effort that you've put into the earlier steps starts to pay off. The 3 main activities within this step are to generate ideas for potential solutions (which may have naturally emerged from step 3), to evaluate and select the best option, then make sure it's as robust as possible before we go live.

But we still don't want to leap into a solution until we're sure that it's the best one. It's easy to fixate on improving a single metric, without investigating the potential side effects – a temptation of which Cadbury New Zealand fell foul at the start of the 2009 economic downturn. They were being proactive... Recognising that money was getting tight, they wanted to help their consumers by reducing the sale price of their most popular products. So they made a recipe change which had no effect on taste or shelf life, and enabled a small reduction in their retail prices.



For a few weeks, all was well. Until it hit the headlines. Then Cadbury got absolutely hammered for being environmentally destructive – they'd replaced cocoa butter with a cheaper alternative. Palm oil, with its widespread links to rainforest destruction. Two key facts were missing from the headlines – firstly, that the cost saving was passed on to consumers rather than boosting profits. And secondly, the palm oil they were using was certified sustainable. But some journalists seem happy not to let the facts get in the way of a panic-inducing headline.

The damage to their reputation, and their profits, was significant. Simply because they didn't consider the full implications of the solution before they went live. Please don't repeat their mistake.

In this step, our people and process paths to improved performance start to weave even more tightly together. Because there's no point choosing a solution which people won't adopt. So this step is best delivered working closely with the wider operational teams, enabling and empowering them to develop their own new ways of working. As in the previous step, effective brainstorming with good facilitation can make a huge difference.



There's a common misconception that it's better to offer lots of choice. A US food retailer's study into consumer behaviour suggests otherwise... To entice buyers to buy jam, they had a sampling station, where people could taste various flavours – to choose which they liked best, and buy it.

Each day, they put out either 6 or 24 flavours for sampling. Then recorded how many people had sampled jam, and how much they sold.

Not surprisingly, on the 24 flavour days, the number of people trying jam doubled. So logically, you'd expect sales to double too. They didn't. Sales were higher on the 6 flavour days - ten times higher. When I first read that, it didn't make sense. How could more people trying jam turn into far fewer people buying jam? And then I realised, I've done that exact same thing.

Making decisions uses a lot of energy, which our brains prefer to conserve. If I've tried a few flavours which I like, deciding which to buy would use valuable energy. So completely outside my conscious awareness, something else will kick in to bypass the need for a decision. It's too expensive, or I don't need any jam right now, and I'll walk away. But if there's just one flavour which I really like, I'll buy it. Even if it's expensive, and even if I don't need jam right now. And I was completely unaware of it until I read the study.

Other studies have revealed that simply increasing a 2-option to a 3-option choice, is enough to double the number of people who'll choose whatever's most familiar, potentially missing out on what's actually more effective. So keep it simple. Having some choice can increase emotional engagement and people's sense of ownership. But beware the temptation to offer too much.



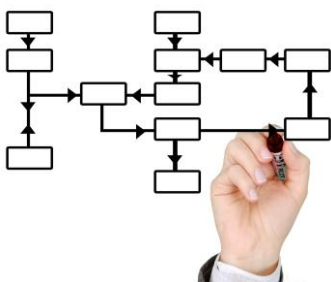
Identifying potential solutions might be straightforward after a thorough step 3. But sometimes, you'll need to get creative. So our Performance Programmes explore how to switch thinking styles, and nurture a culture where innovation can flourish. Then we introduce straightforward ways to select and prioritise what happens next.

In planning a robust solution, we explore how to assess risks, and mistake-proof the new process, designing out potential failures before they can happen - leading to a much smoother implementation, free from the re-works and false starts.

## Step 5 Implement Your Solution

With your solution carefully selected and well-planned, implementation's a lot more straightforward. And here's where your ability to influence, to gain buy-in, and change mindsets and behaviours really comes into its own. Because although we like to think of human behaviour as logical and rational, it rarely is. Which is why everything we do in the 3P Academy focuses on both people and process.

There are no specific tools and techniques linked to this step. It often involves small-scale piloting and experimentation, to fine-tune the solution before introducing it to a wider population. And the effort you've invested during earlier steps, in developing data-aware decision making, enables you to agree concrete measures of success, and correctly identify and fix any glitches that you might find.



Your first process changes might involve limiting the problem's effects, while you're working towards its elimination. For example, a client organisation was working towards resolving the problem of customer orders being dispatched late. So the first thing we did was to develop a system to highlight what orders were at most risk of being late.

This enabled the customer service team to work with customers, to prioritise the orders which were time-critical. As well as reducing the impact of the problem on the customer, this strengthened some important relationships. Throughout this step you're aiming to get your solution not only live, but sustainable. So you're updating documentation and training, setting standards and ways of monitoring, and starting that vital transition of your new process ownership back to business as usual. In short, you're doing everything you can to make new ways of working as efficient and effective as possible, and to get everyone to stick to them.



## Step 6 Optimise and Embed

As with earlier steps, if you've done a thorough enough job of the previous steps, this one's relatively straightforward. The challenges you face are more likely to be behavioural rather than technical, so you'll still need to track performance closely, to nip any developing issues in the bud. Because human behaviours don't always make sense.

One of the most important steps towards doubling the ostomy lines' productivity, was introducing basic operator-led troubleshooting, so they could fix the most common faults themselves, without having to wait hours for an Engineer. And most of the time, it was working brilliantly. They were operating a two-shift system, from 6am to 10pm each day. Tracking the data, I noticed that outside office hours, performance was dropping.

Talking it through with the production teams, it emerged that they didn't feel confident using the new troubleshooting unless I was around in the area, which was mostly during office hours. I was a little baffled, as I wasn't helping them to troubleshoot – so what difference did it make whether I was there?

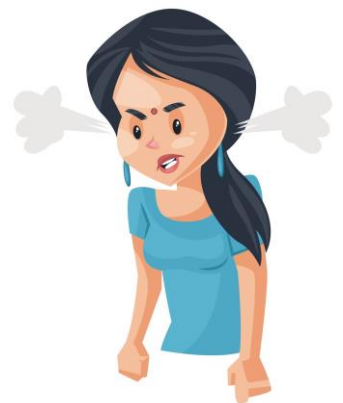
“You don't understand” they said... “We know you keep an ear out, and you won't let us accidentally do something wrong. If we get it wrong, we get shouted at.”

This is not something which happens in an improvement culture – getting shouted at shouldn't happen anywhere. So I asked who did the shouting...

After quite a lengthy debate, it emerged that the shouting had actually been only one incident, over 5 years ago. Someone had done something which their line manager disagreed with, there'd been shouting – and tears... Big drama, so everyone had found out about it.

It also emerged that the shouty manager had left the business 3 years ago. And three quarters of the staff hadn't even been with the business back then. But that one incident was enough to shape everyone's behaviour, until we brought it into their conscious awareness. Then it changed in an instant. These kinds of learned behaviours are much more common than you might think. They can spread like wildfire through an organisation, and persist long after their origins have been forgotten.

Another important foundation for successfully changing behaviours, is to embed the understanding of why the change is needed.





For years, my dentist urged me to floss regularly. But I thought flossing was to remove food debris, and because I wasn't getting any, I didn't see the point. So his advice went unheeded.

I moved to a new dentist, who as well as telling me what to do, also told me why. I had significant risk of bone damage. They gave me a clear reason to clean my teeth more thoroughly than just brushing. My behaviour changed instantly, and permanently.



There are all sorts of reasons why changing behaviours can be less than straightforward. So our performance programmes equip your people with the skills to detect and resolve the most common mind-habits, both in themselves and other people; and with a broad range of strategies for effective influence.

We also dive deep into setting and monitoring standards, and the building blocks of an improvement culture, so that performance continues to improve once it's handed back to business-as-usual.



## Step 7

### Spread the Learning and Celebrate


Once a problem's solved, it's easy to move straight on to the next one without a backwards glance. Because there's always another problem to tackle. But neglecting this final step is a huge missed opportunity. What other processes have similar problems to the ones you've just fixed? Who else will benefit from developing the skills you've helped to embed?

Success in this final step has a lot to do with how you communicate across the organisation, so that the people with newly developed knowledge and skills, and those who'll most benefit from their experiences, can easily identify each other. And of course, this requires the time and head-space for communication and collaboration. It can help to break down hierarchy and departmental silos, and foster a culture of curiosity. From a standing start, it takes time to develop. But this is how a genuine culture of continuous improvement starts to flourish.



Celebrating the improvements is partly about recognising the effort and achievements of those who've worked hard on solving the problem, as well as modelling the behaviours which you want others to adopt. But there's more to it...

Have you ever navigated a tough challenge? There might have been a lot of risk or uncertainty. It might have been really hard going, causing a huge amount of stress. What happens when you look back on it?



Often, it feels less of a stretch than it did at the time. Less daunting. You're through it, and you know how you did it - even though when you were in the thick of it, that might have seemed almost impossible. And the sense of achievement that you might be enjoying, diminishes. Which can make challenges you're still working through feel tougher than the ones you've completed. So this step is also about re-visiting the journey you've taken, and skills you've acquired, in solving this problem. Remembering how it was at the time, to make the problems you're still tackling feel less scary.

And so, for now, our quest to solve more of your problems is at an end. Delivering breakthrough performance results isn't easy – there'll be days when you go home thinking 'Give me a bigger wall to bang my head against'. But there'll be other days, when a properly-optimised solution finally starts to take hold, and that can be one of the best feelings that working life has to offer. So keep going. Keep learning and experimenting, and keep celebrating and sharing the wins.

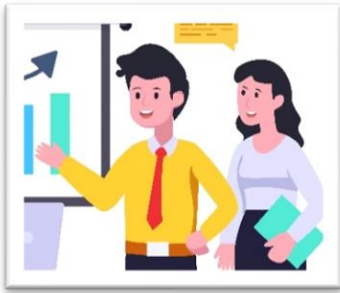
And you're more than welcome to share them with me too – I'd love to hear how you're putting what you've learned into practice, and the differences which a new insight, or little tweak can make.



## Introducing the 3P Academy - Getting Busy People Fixing Tough Problems

Delivering exceptional performance isn't easy, especially when everyone's busy. Even the most compelling vision and solid business case aren't always enough to deliver sustainable change, and the performance you know is possible.

The 3P Academy is dedicated to helping businesses like yours to develop a culture of world class continuous improvement, and the breakthrough KPI performance which it enables. Our support follows two parallel paths...



### Performance through People

Your people are amazing – one of your biggest business assets. Some of the time...

Because no matter how talented, dedicated or experienced they are, every one of your people deals with stress and uncertainty every day: Competing priorities, difficult customers, tight deadlines...

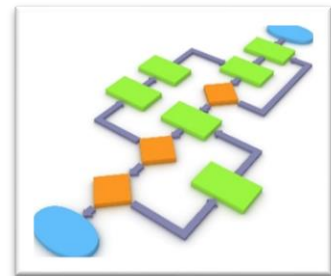
They'll take most of those challenges in their stride. But the more they build up, the more they impact performance, which can easily snowball. So we embed the resilience, communication and influence skills to keep your people performing at their collective best, even under pressure.

### Performance through Process

Process isn't usually a word to quicken the pulse with excitement. Yet there's a process for everything your business does, from welcoming new customers to creating your annual reports.

When they're working they get little attention, but when processes aren't at their best, the mistakes and work-arounds become a silent capacity thief – leaving less time for what everyone's really meant to be doing. And your KPIs get harder to maintain, let alone improve.

We're experts at getting operational teams delivering breakthrough process improvements, to enhance productivity, capacity and on-time delivery, reduce quality issues and complaints, and improve customer experience - leading to less stress, and a healthier bottom line.



## Some of Our Key Numbers



**People We've Trained**

Over 1,000



**Processes they've Improved**

More than 5,000



**Resulting annual value**

Around £75million, and counting...

## Examples of the Organisations we've Supported

LLOYDS  
BANKING  
GROUP



UK SPACE  
AGENCY

M&S

COSATTO®  
clever stuff for happy babies

St John  
Ambulance



PHOENIX  
Medical Supplies Limited

Progress  
HOUSING GROUP



HSBC

dudley  
building society

## What You Can Expect from Us

### *Driven by you, delivered from within*

Our role's not to have the answers (because no one likes being told what to do anyway). It's to equip and empower your people to break new ground in KPI performance. Because solutions which are owned by the people who created them, give lasting results.

### *Keeping it simple (because everyone's busy)*

No matter how strong the desire to improve, day-to-day reality can get in the way. So we're flexible and adaptable to your needs and constraints, delivering bite-sized, to give your people more time to do what they're best at.

### *Real-World Ways of Working*

A solid business case and robust plan often get you only part way there - because people don't always do what makes sense. So by blending behavioural science with continuous improvement, we enable your people to challenge assumptions, and change attitudes, mindsets and behaviours - clearing the way to performance breakthroughs.



Sue's one of the most knowledgeable and professional mentors I've had the pleasure of learning from, and I can definitely recommend. Sue also supported developing a group of green belt change champions

*Adam Cardinal. Global Director, Malvern Panalytical*



Sue is a rare individual... an engineer with superb people skills. I've seen multiple examples of where Sue's interventions either completely prevented a problem, or stopped it spiralling out of control.

*Steven Houghton-Burnett. IT Director, Freeman Clarke*

## What We Do

### 3P Academy Transformational Programmes

There's nothing we love more than working with you to embed the shared skills, systems and language of performance throughout your business. This is typically a 12 month programme, and suits a six-plus-figure business employing 50 or more people.

Every programme's designed bespoke, tailored to your specific needs, and is delivered bite-sized to fit into busy schedules. Workshop sessions are hands-on, so participants apply their new skills to deliver improvements as they learn – projects typically deliver between £15K and £250K of business value within the first few months.

### A Guided Project or Process Improvement

For smaller businesses or those who want to focus on a specific improvement, we facilitate strategic projects and deliver the first significant step-change within a selected process area. Using our unique blend of continuous improvement and the latest behavioural science, this can also include Lean Six Sigma Yellow or Green Belt certification for your improvement champions.

### Masterclasses and Keynote Presentations – developing Resourceful Thinking

Our interactive sessions are designed to equip your people to perform at their best, even under pressure. There are 12 topics, which can be delivered stand-alone for a conference or away-day, or as a series, including How to Keep Stress Useful, How to Deal with Uncertainty and Change, Handling Difficult Conversations and Effective Decision-Making.

Described as 'a vitamin boost for the emotional immune system', the most common outcomes include improved sleep quality, resolving repetitive worrying, improved motivation and problem-solving, and reduced friction in important relationships.

### Developing Your Leaders

These half-day interactive Masterclasses equip your leaders to navigate the complexity of competing priorities, internal politics and challenging personalities, putting them at the heart of your developing improvement culture. Topics include how to influence and lead change, communicate more effectively, and deliver exceptional performance (even when everyone's busy).

### Coaching and Consultancy

We also work one-to-one with individuals, and with leadership and change teams for personally tailored skills development. Designed to help you cut through the complexity to fast-track your improvements, overcome the blind spots, and deliver performance improvements more swiftly and smoothly.

## Introducing Sue Evans, 3P Academy Director



My whole career's been about creating effective, lasting change. I spent the first half of it embedding Continuous improvement within international organisations including Danone, Corning and Lloyds Banking Group. Highlights include two programmes which more than doubled site productivity, and delivering £1.9M waste reduction in under 5 months.

Hands-on experience at both ends of the World Class spectrum has given me a unique perspective for nurturing an improvement culture from any starting point.

Gaining my first Six Sigma Black Belt qualification over 25 years ago, I was part of a world-class business. Our strategy, systems and culture made breakthrough change straightforward. At the time I thought that was normal... On moving to my next role, I quickly discovered that it wasn't.

I moved to a business with no strategy, few systems, and none of the culture and infrastructure which I'd come to take for granted. So I set about creating it. I presented a no-spend, £1million saving initiative, only to be told "Don't worry about it". It was the first time I'd encountered a solid business case and plan getting no support. And it floored me.

But bit-by-bit, I found ways round the complacency and objections, engaging the operational teams to more than double productivity and halve process scrap, in less than 8 months. After delivering further £multi-million breakthroughs in a second from-scratch organisation, I established what's now evolved into the 3P Academy. Our programmes are carefully crafted from a signature blend of Continuous Improvement and Behavioural Science.

Across 10 years of delivering to around 25,000 people from hundreds of organisations, I've maintained an average feedback score of 9.2 out of 10. As well as supporting leadership teams to embed an improvement culture, I've mentored a diverse portfolio of projects, ranging from £15K to over £600K annual business value.

I'm a Master Practitioner and Trainer of NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), and an Approved Havening® Practitioner, trained in each by the original creators. I have a Diploma in CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), a combined Diploma in Hypnotherapy, Coaching and NLP; and Institute of Leadership and Management certification as a Mentor and Coach. I'm also a Fellow of the Professional Speaking Association – one of less than 70 across the whole of the UK and Ireland.

It's my mission to get people fixing the problems which no one else has been brave enough to tackle. Because in many businesses, the answers to unlocking ground-breaking improvements are hiding right there, in plain sight. I believe in every individual's right to a challenging and fulfilling working life, and in every organisation's right to reap the rewards of building and supporting a capable and motivated workforce. That might sound idealistic, but the right know-how can make it your reality.