

Business Essentials: Learning

It's back-to-school time! Get into learning mode — and make the lessons count.

by Tom Dzialo

Continuously improving skills and increasing knowledge through a Professional Development program is as important for a business, company, or organization as it is for an individual. Last month, we focused on the importance of personal Professional Development, and that prompted readers to ask a common question: "What if our company invests in a Professional Development program for an individual, and then he or she leaves the company?" Our response to that is, "What if you don't, and that person stays?"

Balancing the goals of individual Personal Development with the goals of the organization is essential. Conflict, frustration, and turnover are inevitable when that balance is not maintained.

Changing paradigms in an organization is no small feat, but if an organization invests in educating an employee and then makes it difficult for that person to implement what he or she learns, it gets frustrating. Too often, employees feel that new ideas are not even given a fair hearing, much less seriously considered, accepted, or adopted.

To survive, companies must improve, and improvement involves change. If an organization does not keep pace with its employees' development, these people will either get frustrated and leave — or worse yet, get discouraged and stay.

Change can move through an organization in four ways. The easiest is physical change, followed by logistical change, managerial change, and finally organizational change. That is the most difficult to pull off, but

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Beyond the "To Do" List: The PDCA Cycle for Success

by Tom Dzialo

It's not enough to be busy. So are the ants! The question is: What are we busy about?

— Henry David Thoreau

Studies have shown that the simple act of writing down what you want to accomplish (e.g., your "To Do" list) significantly increases the likelihood that you will accomplish it. The PDCA Cycle is a simple yet powerful tool that has been developed to guide you and to help ensure the delivery of the results you want. When integrated into daily operations, it can drive a culture of continuous improvement.

PDCA stands for Plan, Do, Check, Act. The PDCA Cycle helps individuals, teams, and organizations perform significantly better, because the model provides a simple framework for the improvement of a process or system. It can be used to guide an entire improvement project or to develop specific projects once target improvement areas have been identified.

Where did The PDCA Cycle originate?

The PDCA Cycle comes from a combination of scientific and quality systems. It has evolved into many variants with many pseudonyms. The original PDCA Cycle was conceived by Walter Shewhart, a scientist at Bell Labs. He developed Statistical Process Control (SPC) in the late 1920's; hence, one of the early names for the PDCA Cycle is the Shewhart Cycle.

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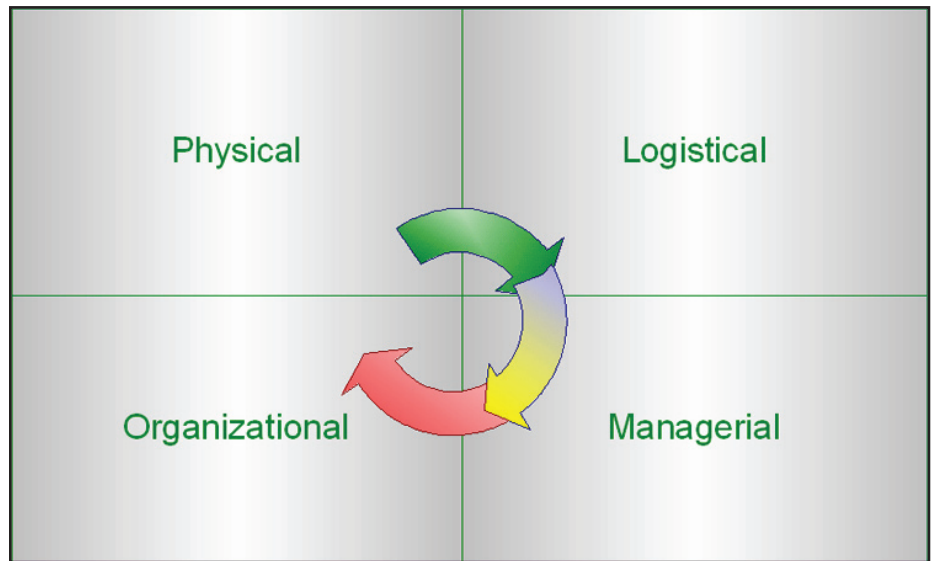
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certainly the most long-lasting and worthwhile when it is based on solid judgement and sound reasoning. These are things that can be enhanced through Personal Development programs.

The good news is that there are numerous organizations, both national and local, available to help you. These organizations can be found in every state, and they cover every function within almost every organization and industry.

Membership and participation in such organizations give businesses a window to the outside world. The benefits of getting involved include networking, benchmarking, plant tours, workshops, seminars, conferences, and cost effective education and training.

Start putting together your company's professional development plan, and use PDCA to deliver real results to



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your organization.

Listed below is just a small sampling of national/international and local professional development organizations for your company to consider.

There are many others available to assist you, and finding them can be easy. Just start with your favorite internet search engine. ■

Examples of Local (Connecticut) organizations:

CBIA (www.cbia.com)

Connecticut Business and Industry Association

MAC (www.mact.org)

The Manufacturing Alliance of Connecticut

NHMA (www.newhavenmanufacturers.com)

New Haven Manufacturing Association

SMA (www.sma-ct.com)

Smaller Manufacturers Association of Connecticut, Inc.



Examples of National organizations:

AAM (www.americanmanufacturing.org)

The Alliance for American Manufacturing

APICS (www.apics.org)

The Association for Operations Management

IHI (www.ihl.org)

The Institute for Healthcare Improvement

LEI (www.lean.org)

Lean Enterprise Institute

NALI (www.usnali.org)

National Aerospace Leadership Initiative

NAM (www.nam.org)

National Association of Manufacturers

TI (www.toastmasters.org)

Toastmasters International



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Shewhart was a friend and mentor to W. Edward Deming. Deming adopted the concept of PDCA (also known as the Deming Wheel) and integrated it into his quality teachings. He brought it with him to Japan, and today it is used as a key component of the Toyota Production System (TPS).

The PDCA Cycle: Its strength is its simplicity!

- **PLAN:** Plan, design, or revise business process components to improve results.
- **DO:** Go and “do.” Implement the plan and measure its performance.
- **CHECK:** Check or assess the measurements and progress against the Plan.
- **ACT (or Adjust):** Implement the change as the new standard or decide on adjustments needed to improve the process.

While it is literally that simple, it is a critical, cornerstone component in the foundation of formal quality programs such as Six Sigma. If the business consequences of getting things wrong are significant, PDCA and formal quality programs are essential. It makes sense to run a well-crafted pilot project using PDCA to monitor and manage progress. That way, if the pilot doesn't deliver the results you expected, you get the chance to fix and improve things along the way before you fully commit your reputation and resources.

As the PDCA Cycle diagram illustrates, PDCA is a closed loop system; that is, the 'Check' provides the feedback measurement to objectively quantify whether the intended results were achieved, while the 'Act' (or Adjust) step closes the loop for the plan. If the planned results were achieved, the new process becomes the new standard. If the intended results were not achieved, or additional improvement

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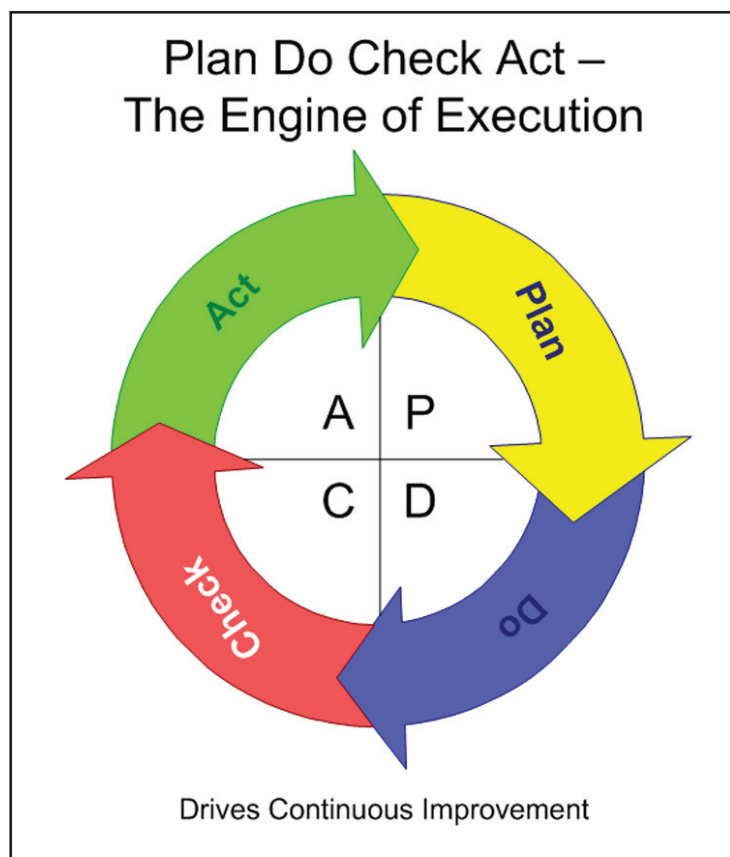
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opportunities were identified, the plan is adjusted or another plan cycle is begun. This initiates a program of never-ending improvement.

On a personal level, the key to time management is optimizing your personal “Prime Time” or best performing hours. Use your Prime Time to do the most productive tasks that are focused on moving you closer to your goals. Scheduling of tasks is important because working at your best level of performance brings tangible results.

Use PDCA to ensure that the personal tasks you are scheduling align with your goals. Share your plans with others in order to build consensus and encourage teamwork and a more collaborative work culture. Other members of your team can also help you identify opportunities for improvement.

Everyone likes to be on a winning team, so share your PDCA successes with others, especially teammates, and watch the practice spread. ■





Mark your calendar ...

Date	Event	Location
September 14 - 16	<u>2008 APICS International Conference & Expo</u>	Kansas City, Missouri
October 15 - 16	<u>The Fourth Annual Northeast Shingo Prize Conference</u>	Boston, Mass.
October 20 - 24	<u>2008 AME Conference</u>	Toronto, Canada
October 27 - 29	<u>SME Lean to Green Manufacturing</u>	Portland, Oregon
November 10	<u>Introduction to Enterprise Resources Planning</u> <i>(with Sixth Floor's Fred Heintz)</i>	CCSU ITBD Conference Center, Hartford, Conn.
December 8 - 11	<u>20th Annual National Forum on Quality Improvement in Healthcare</u>	Nashville, Tennessee

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