

ABOUT GEMBA

Background

GEMBA accompanies industrial and service organizations in achieving operational excellence (OPEX). Our method involves training both blue-collar workers and white-collar managers to implement our unique OPEX tools autonomously, without reliance on external consultants.

Our Approach

Every organization operates in a certain current state and strives to reach its goals. We view the gap between the current state and the desired state as a collection of problems. The better an organization handles these problems, the closer it moves toward its goals.

One significant cultural difference we identify between organizations is "who solves the problems." In many Western organizations, the prevailing culture expects managers to solve most of the organization's problems, including those that arise on the shop floor or service area, known as the gembu (a Japanese term meaning "the actual place" where value is created for the customer). If we accept the assumption that the root of most organizational problems lies in the gembu, then a problem will surface from the gembu and move up the hierarchy until a manager identifies it and instructs a top-down solution.

In contrast, Japanese management culture advocates problem-solving by those on the ground, namely, blue-collar workers. The assumption is that if the root of the organization's problems lies in the gembu, then it is appropriate for someone from the gembu to identify, surface, and solve the problem, leading to a bottom-up solution.

At GEMBA, we train organizations to adopt efficiency tools and managerial skills that facilitate bottom-up problem-solving. We believe that the role of a gembu worker includes identifying, surfacing, and solving problems, while a manager's role is to set clear goals, create dynamics that stimulate, encourage, and expect employees to solve problems routinely, and support the employee throughout the solution implementation process.

Our TORCHES Model

Our TORCHES model is named after the trained blue-collar workers who are called torches because they ignite the OPEX light in their surroundings. Each torch learns one or more tools to address various problems identified as organizational pains.

In our jargon, we refer to solving routine work floor problems as "picking the money up off the floor."

Training a torch involves two stages. First, they learn the basics of OPEX and Lean Management principles and one or two OPEX tools relevant to their daily routine. Then, they enter an “on-the-job training” program, where they facilitate a local improvement team, using and practicing the learned tools. In the second stage, they are tutored by one of GEMBA’s senior facilitators, who evaluates their facilitation skills rather than the content of the issue. This evaluation includes checking whether they used the tools properly, led the team effectively, and covered everything planned for the session.

By empowering gemba workers and managers with these skills and tools, GEMBA fosters a culture of continuous improvement and operational excellence.