What is A-3?

The A3 Problem Solving is a Lean tool used to identify the root cause of a problem and standardize processes to improve quality. A3 refers to a European paper size that is roughly equivalent to an American 11- x 17 tabloid-sized paper. Process improvement is continual — performance is measured against targets and adjustments made frequently.

The A3 is used for three primary purposes problem solving, decision points and reporting.

Example:

**Background:**
- Concisely describe the opportunity sought or problem to resolve and the business reason it should be addressed

**Current Condition:**
- Show the facts, data and processes that define the background
- Use visuals like charts, graphs, drawings, etc. to define the problem
- Show the specific targets in visual terms

**Analysis**
- Show the Root Cause using a simple tool like:
  - Fishbone diagrams
  - The 5 why’s
  - Problem analysis tree

**Proposal – What do we want it to be:**
- Proposed countermeasures
- Alternatives compare in terms of cost, feasibility, effectiveness, etc.
- Show how your recommendations address root cause

**Plan:**
- Show the what, who and when related to putting countermeasure in place

**Follow up:**
- What problems or issues you anticipate and how you will ensure continuous improvement

**Summary:**

Most problems that arise in organizations are addressed in superficial ways, what some call "first-order problem-solving." That is, we work around the problem to accomplish our immediate objective, but do not address the root cause of the problem so as to prevent its recurrence. By not addressing the root cause, we encounter the same problem or same type of problem again and again, and operational performance does not improve.

**Remember:**

The A3 model provides us a tool to make the right changes and sustain them long term.

References: