

Lean Solutions

Womack and Jones expand lean toolkit with powerful new applications of core principles.

The wide adoption of lean principles over the past two decades has helped countless companies produce better products, eliminate waste, and maximize value. Yet despite significant gains, it is time for lean thinking to tackle the next challenge on the path of perfection. As Jim Womack and Dan Jones argue in their new book, lean practice must now take a disciplined approach to improving the processes that go beyond the factory floor.

“Despite a growing variety of better products with fewer defects at lower cost available from a growing range of sales channels, the experiences of consumers seem to be deteriorating. In recent years, we’ve frequently found ourselves discussing this phenomenon with managers. They report that when they are wearing their producer hats in the office or factory, things seem to be getting better. But when they go home and put on their consumer hats, things seem to be getting worse,” say the authors in *Lean Solutions: How Companies and Customers Can Create Value and Wealth Together*.

“Consumption should be easier and more satisfying due to better, cheaper products. Instead it requires growing time and hassle to get all of our goods and services to work properly and work together. Stated another way, today’s consumers are often drowning in a sea of brilliant objects. And this seems very strange when we stop to consider that satisfying consumption—not just making brilliant products—is the whole point of lean production.”

The lean pioneers address this issue by expanding their principles to the next logical area, staying true to the heart of lean. “As we grasped the situation, we realized that we needed to heed our principles of lean production by returning to the starting point, the question of value. We needed to ask what consumers really want in the era ahead. Then we needed to rethink consumption from first principles as a process—like production, but from the opposite direction—in order to discover a better way from consumers to obtain the goods and services they want now. We call this process *lean consumption*.

“Lean consumption must have a companion process. Companies must provide the goods and services consumers actually want, when and where they are wanted, without burdening the consumer. We’ve used

the term 'lean production' in the past, but too many managers act as if production stops at the office door or the factory gate. So we now use the term *lean provision*, which comprises all of the steps required to deliver the desired value from producer to customer, often running through a number of organizations.

"Most of us find it easy to think about consumption when we are consumers and easy to think about provision when we are at work. But all of us find it difficult to see these interlocking processes together as a unified value stream. As we have walked through a range of industries in recent years, from airlines to healthcare to automotive repair services, we have repeatedly observed consumers and employees struggling valiantly with misaligned consumption and provision processes that alienate customers, drain away profits, and burden staff with feelings of rage and despair. Yet they soldier on in a fog of mutual incomprehension.

"As we continued our investigations—visiting many companies in many industries in many countries—we began to see that if truly lean provision can be married to truly lean consumption, life can be better for consumers, more satisfying for employees, and more profitable for providers. A win-win-win is possible in which providers, employees, and consumers create lean solutions together. This fundamental insight led directly to this book."

Lean Solutions provides compelling examples ranging from health care to retail. The authors share the success stories of Fujitsu, which has fundamentally transformed how it handles call centers, and Tesco, whose lean provision systems have enabled the company to emerge as the leanest, highest-quality, and best-managed retailer in Europe. Lean managers at every stage of their journey will benefit from this book by learning to see new ways to improve their processes in the service of providing value to customers.

According to Jones, who founded LEA, "The heart of LEA's mission is to create a complete toolkit for Lean Thinkers to use in transforming business. Jim and I wrote *Lean Solutions* with that goal in mind—helping LEA to be a dynamic and continually evolving means of sharing knowledge among Lean Thinkers. We hope this book will help you enact dramatic and positive change."