

Foreword

Mike Rother's *Toyota Kata* is a rare and exciting event — a book that casts entirely new light on a much heralded set of management practices, giving those practices new significance and power. Countless people in the past 20 or more years have studied and written about Toyota's wildly successful management thinking and practice. But paradoxically, despite the vast amount of knowledge presented in these works, no organization outside Toyota's family of companies has ever come close to matching Toyota's stellar performance. There is a widespread feeling that something Toyota does is still not understood and put into practice by non-Toyota companies.

Toyota Kata will change all that. In this book, Mike Rother penetrates Toyota's management methods to a depth never before reached. In doing so, he offers a set of new ideas and practices that enables any organization, in any business, to do what it takes to match Toyota's performance.

This is not the first book in which Mike Rother presents path-breaking insights into Toyota. He advanced the business world's understanding of Toyota's methods light-years in his 1998 book *Learning to See*, coauthored with John Shook. A brief look at the message of

Learning to See explains how *Toyota Kata* advances that understanding yet another order of magnitude.¹

Learning to See describes and explains a mapping tool Toyota uses to “see” how work moves from the start of production to delivering finished product to the ultimate customer. Known inside Toyota as “material and information flow mapping,” Rother, Shook, and publisher Jim Womack renamed Toyota’s tool “value-stream mapping” and explained it for the first time in their book. Thanks to the enormous success of *Learning to See*, value-stream mapping became one of the most widely used tools to teach and practice Toyota’s vaunted production system.

With the value-stream mapping tool, Rother and Shook show how to use many of Toyota’s well-known techniques systematically to change a conventional batch-oriented mass-production factory flow — replete with countless interruptions and massive delays—into a flow resembling what one finds in a typical Toyota factory. Familiar names for some of these techniques are *takt time*, *andon*, *kanban*, *heijunka*, and *jidoka*. For most students of Toyota, *Learning to See* was the first extensive and clear explanation into how to use Toyota’s techniques to improve across an entire facility.

That book, however, does not explore why and how these techniques evolved, and continue to evolve, at Toyota. Although *Learning to See* provides a monumental step forward in understanding how Toyota achieved the remarkable results it has enjoyed for over 50 years, it does not reveal why others, after implementing Toyota-style techniques, still seem unable to emulate Toyota’s performance. How does Toyota develop its solutions? What specific process do they use? Now, in *Toyota Kata: Managing People for Improvement, Adaptiveness, and Superior Results*, Mike Rother shows us this next vital layer of Toyota practice.

The central message of *Toyota Kata* is to describe and explain Toyota’s process for managing people. Rother sets forth with great clarity and detail Toyota’s unique improvement and leadership routines, or *kata*, by which Toyota achieves sustained competitive advantage. The transformative insight in *Toyota Kata* is that Toyota’s “improvement

kata” and “coaching kata” both transcend the results-oriented level of thinking inherent in the management methods still used in most companies in the Western world.

The findings in *Toyota Kata* confirm my own interpretation of what I observed so often in Toyota operations since my first study mission to Toyota’s giant facility (TMMK) in Georgetown, Kentucky, in 1992.² What distinguishes Toyota’s practices from those observed in American and other Western companies is their focus on what I call “managing by means,” or MBM, rather than “managing by results,” or MBR. As far back as 1992, I learned from President Fujio Cho and members of his management team at Georgetown that Toyota steadfastly believes that organizational routines for improvement and adaptation, not quantitative/financial targets, define the pathway to competitive advantage and long-term organizational survival.

In this era, business organizations also have a great influence on the nature of society. How these organizations operate and, especially, the ways of thinking and acting they teach their members define not only the organizations’ success but great swaths of our social fabric as well. While a rapid advance of knowledge about human behavior is now under way, those scientific findings are still too far removed from the day-to-day operation of our companies. Business organizations cannot yet access and use them to their benefit in practical ways. Because *Toyota Kata* is about developing new patterns of thinking and behavior in organizations, it provides a means for science to find application in our everyday lives. The potential is to reach new levels of performance in human endeavor by adopting more effective ways of working, and of working together.

In my opinion, the greatest change Mike Rother’s *Toyota Kata* can bring to the non-Toyota business world is to replace traditional financial-results-driven management thinking with an understanding that outstanding financial results and long-term organization survival follow best from continuous and robust process improvement and adaptation—not from driving people to achieve financial targets without regard for how their actions affect processes. What has prevented this change from happening before now is the lack of a clear and comprehensive

explanation of how continuous improvement and adaptation occur in Toyota, the only company I know in the world that truly manages by means, not by results. That explanation is now available to anyone who studies Mike Rother's findings and message in *Toyota Kata*.

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Notes

- 1 Mike Rother and John Shook, *Learning to See: Value Stream Mapping to Add Value and Eliminate Muda* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Lean Enterprise Institute, 1998).
- 2 I recount my findings from these study missions in Chapter 3 and other parts of H. Thomas Johnson and Anders Broms, *Profit Beyond Measure: Extraordinary Results Through Attention to Process and People* (New York: The Free Press, 2000; and London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2000 and 2008).