

Foreword

I'm enormously excited about this book. John Shook's *Managing to Learn* seeks to answer a simple but profound question: What is at the heart of lean management and lean leadership?

In addressing this question, *Managing to Learn* helps fill in the gap between our understanding of lean tools, such as value-stream mapping, and *the sustainable application of these tools*. In the process it reveals:

- The distinction between old-fashioned, top-down, command-and-control management and lean management.
- The difference between an organization based on *authority* and one based on *responsibility*.
- The enduring benefits realized by managers who dig deep in the details to discover root causes rather than jumping to solutions.
- The power of creating managers and leaders *through* the process of solving problems and implementing plans.

Managing to Learn shines a bright light on the many dimensions by which the lean method is superior to today's dominant approach to management and to leadership (which are often nothing more than firefighting). Perhaps most extraordinarily, this book shows how this better method of management is taught and learned through dialogue about concrete problems. It does this by means of a dialogue between a lean manager and a subordinate who learns lean management and leadership as he solves an important problem.

This process of solving problems while creating better employees—A3 analysis—is core to the Toyota management system. An A3 report guides the dialogue and analysis. It identifies the current situation, the nature of the issue, the range of possible countermeasures, the best countermeasure, the means (who will do what when) to put it into practice, and the evidence that the issue has actually been addressed.

This volume describes A3 analysis and provides examples of how to use the tool. But its truly important contribution is to explain the thought process behind the tool—A3 thinking. Indeed, A3 thinking turns routine managing into cumulative learning for the whole organization. Hence the title, *Managing to Learn*.

Because A3 thinking is so different from conventional management thinking, only someone who actually has experienced it as an employee and deployed it as a manager can fully explain its nuances. John is therefore the ideal author. He was hired in 1983 as an employee at Toyota in Japan, where he learned A3 as the pupil, the *deshi*. As he became a manager he practiced A3 as the teacher, the *sensei*. At the same time, he was

still the deshi of higher-level managers, whose core management tasks included teaching additional aspects of A3 analysis to everyone they managed.

John's job eventually became to help manage the transfer of Toyota's lean management system across the world. He began this work at the NUMMI joint venture with General Motors in 1984, and continued with the startup of Toyota's Georgetown facility in 1986. Next, he transferred to Toyota's rapidly expanding North American engineering center in Ann Arbor, MI, and then finished his Toyota career helping launch the Toyota Supplier Support Center in Kentucky. At every stop he taught A3 thinking by mentoring younger managers and employees, and continued his own learning through A3 dialogue with his superiors. Since leaving Toyota he has taught these principles to organizations across the world.

John's book is a unique achievement in explaining a vital management tool while at the same time revealing the thought process behind its use. To achieve this dual purpose the book employs a unique layout. The thoughts and actions of the lower-level manager are on the left side of the page and the simultaneous thoughts and actions of the higher-level supervisor are on the right side. You will see a learning process unfolding as a complex problem is solved and a new lean manager is created.

The transition to A3 management is a major leap for all of us. It demands that we manage by PDCA (plan, do, check, act), the scientific method, and science is hard work. We all want to jump to conclusions about what to do, and then be given the freedom as managers to "just do it." Yet A3 thinking continually pulls us toward a much more constructive reality. There we look hard at the current situation, dig deep to discover the root cause of problems, consider many countermeasures (not just the most obvious "solution"), rigorously lay out an implementation plan, and carefully collect data to see if our countermeasure has really improved the situation. And then we repeat this cycle.

In *Managing to Learn*, John has captured the thought process behind lean management and leadership. And he has provided the methods you will need to succeed with A3 analysis. This way of thinking is essential to gaining and sustaining the benefits of the lean tools you have already mastered.

We are eager to hear about your successes as well as your difficulties. Please contact us and John by sending your comments and questions to mtl@lean.org. With a bit of practice and a lot of perseverance, we can all manage to learn.

Jim Womack
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