



Lean Enterprise Institute

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Book *Managing to Learn* Gets to the Heart of Lean Management

Author John Shook explains how the A3 process links strategy and problem solving, thus transforming managing in order to ‘command-and-control’ into ‘managing to learn.’

Cambridge, Mass., Oct. 14, 2008 -- Over the past 20 years lean thinking has emerged as the most powerful source of competitive advantage for Toyota and its followers. Yet while many companies have adopted key lean tools and techniques successfully, no one has addressed what *Lean Thinking* author Jim Womack calls a simple but profound question: What is at the heart of lean management and lean leadership?

Managing to Learn: Using the A3 Management Process to Solve Problems, Gain Agreement, Manage, Mentor, and Lead, by Toyota veteran John Shook, reveals how Toyota creates engaged and analytical employees through the process of solving problems. A3 thinking -- and the underlying A3 management -- is the process by which Toyota identifies, frames, and then acts on problems and challenges at all levels. Shook calls this approach, which is captured in the simple structure of an A3 report, “the key to Toyota’s entire system of developing talent and continually deepening its knowledge and capabilities.”

The A3 Report is a Toyota-pioneered practice of getting the problem, the analysis, the corrective actions, and the action plan down on a single sheet of large (A3) paper, often with the use of graphics. A3 paper is the international term for a large sheet of paper, roughly equivalent to the 11-by-17-inch U.S. sheet.

Individuals familiar with lean management recognize A3 reports as a powerful tool that enables people to frame problems consistently, gain agreement, tap facts as the basis for decision making, and garner effective countermeasures based on the work at hand. In this new workbook, Shook teaches how to write and use this powerful common approach to problems and projects.

Yet *Managing to Learn* also reveals how A3 reports serve as more than simple tools for effective communication and problem-solving:

“In this book I want to reveal A3 as a management process,” says Shook. “The widespread adoption of the A3 process standardizes a methodology for innovating, planning, problem-solving, and building foundational structures for sharing a broader and deeper form of thinking that produces organizational learning that is deeply rooted in the work itself.”

Managing to Learn uses a unique format that teaches readers how to produce and use A3 reports, while at the same time explaining the underlying basis for these tools. We see how a lean manager, Desi Porter, learns the formal elements of an A3 proposal and its applications as he tackles a key project; at the same time, the thinking behind the coaching of his manager, Ken Sanderson, is revealed on the same page. As a result, readers learn *how* to write a powerful A3 -- while learning *why* the technique is at the core of lean management and lean leadership.

Managing to Learn shares powerful insights about how lean management really works. Among the key elements:

- Lean managers concern themselves with responsibility rather than authority. They focus their attention on the gritty details of a situation -- earning the responsibility to make a decision by becoming authoritative on the matter at hand. This contrasts strongly with traditional managers who use blind authority to make decisions, without necessarily developing the critical knowledge needed for sound action.
- All decisions must be based on a rigorous analysis of the work at hand, derived from careful observation and exploration of what happens at the “gemba” (regardless of whether this is an industrial, white-collar, medical, or other setting.) As a result, lean managers lead by being knowledgeable, fact-based, and strong-willed.
- Lean leaders practice “pull-based authority,” meaning that they earn the power to make key decisions at the time that these decisions need to be made. In contrast to traditional command-and-control organizations, authority is pulled to where it is needed when it is needed.
- Lean management can best be understood neither as “top-down” nor “bottom-up.” Rather, the A3 process clarifies responsibility by placing ownership squarely on the shoulders of the owner-author of the A3, the individual whose initials appear in the upper right-hand corner of the paper. This person earns the responsibility to get decisions made.
- In this system, decisions are made “just-in-time.” The process of doing root-cause analysis, exploring numerous potential countermeasures, and involving the input of key individuals touching the work enables the team make the right decision only when the time is right to do so. Like the famed Toyota development system, many options are assessed for some time. The players avoid

prematurely choosing one design or “solution” that may end debate so to as fully explore the best potential choice.

“This book promises to have as deep an impact on the way lean companies manage people as Shook’s *Learning to See* has had on managing processes,” says Womack, founder and chairman of the Lean Enterprise Institute. “Readers will take away from this book a powerful tool that will help solve problems, plan projects, and develop a common way of addressing vital business issues. But more importantly, let me share John’s words from the book’s introduction: ‘They will learn an underlying way of thinking that reframes all activities as learning activities at every level of the organization, whether it’s standardized work and kaizen at the individual level, system kaizen at the managerial level, or fundamental strategic decisions at the corporate level.’”

Ten years ago John Shook co-authored *Learning to See*, a groundbreaking LEI publication that taught readers how to map value streams to identify and eliminate waste. Since then the book has sold more than 173,000 copies, been translated into 12 languages, and become the standard resource for one of the most widely adopted techniques of the past decade.

With *Managing to Learn*, Shook introduces a fundamentally new set of principles that will enable people to move beyond applying lean tools for temporary gains, and begin to systematically use them in a sustainable fashion.

For review copies of *Managing to Learn* or interviews with John Shook, please contact:
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- *Managing to Learn: Using the A3 Management Process to Solve Problems, Gain Agreement, Mentor, and Lead*

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- See sample A3 documents

http://www.lean.org/images/MTL_sampleA3s_web.pdf

View the *Managing to Learn* webinar on the A3 and lean management

http://www.lean.org/events/oct_webinar_mtl_pt1.html

- About author John Shook

John Shook learned about lean while working for 10 years with Toyota, helping that company transfer its production, engineering, and management systems from Japan to its

overseas affiliates and suppliers. This real-world experience in implementing lean principles throughout an organization gives him extraordinary insights into the challenges faced by those who are interested in lean manufacturing. As co-author of *Learning to See*, John helped introduce Value Stream Mapping as the tool that allows lean practitioners to speak a common language.

He now spends his time researching and developing lean principles with Jim Womack, Dan Jones, and Jose Ferro as a senior advisor in the Lean Enterprise Institute, and co-directing the University of Michigan, Japan Technology Management Program. As head of Lean Transformations Group, an active consulting group, John works with companies to help them understand and implement lean manufacturing. John is a true sensei who enthusiastically shares his knowledge and insights within the lean community, and with those who have not yet made the leap.

- What is Lean?

<http://www.lean.org/WhatsLean/>

The term “lean production” refers to a complete business system for organizing and managing product development, operations, suppliers, customer relations, and the overall enterprise that requires less human effort, less space, less capital, less material, and less time to make products with fewer defects to precise customer desires, compared with traditional management. Toyota pioneered lean management as a complete business system after World War II. During the late 1980s, a research team headed by Womack at MIT’s International Motor Vehicle Program coined the term “lean” to describe Toyota’s system.

About the Lean Enterprise Institute

<http://www.lean.org/WhoWeAre/LEINews.cfm>

The Lean Enterprise Institute (LEI) was founded in 1997 by management expert James P. Womack, Ph.D. as a nonprofit research, education, publishing, and conferencing company with a mission to advance lean thinking around the world. We teach courses, hold management seminars, write and publish books and workbooks, and organize public and private conferences. We use the surplus revenues from these activities to conduct research projects and to support other lean initiatives such as the Lean Education Academic Network (www.teachinglean.org) and the Lean Global Network (www.leanglobal.org).

- About James Womack

<http://www.lean.org/WhoWeAre/LeanPerson.cfm?LeanPersonId=1>