

On Time, in Full: Achieving Perfect Delivery with Lean Thinking in Purchasing, Supply Chain, and Production Planning

Timothy McLean

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Reviewed by: Alexander Franco

Faculty of the Graduate School of Business, Stamford International University

Email: alexander.franco@stamford.edu

This book was written by a practitioner with thirty years of experience in the worlds of manufacturing and supply chain management. Though the work provides fundamental definitions pertaining to terms regarding logistics and supply chain management, it is primarily written as a practical guide for those already in the business world. The focus is to address existing issues that companies may already have in providing more efficient maintenance of inventory or more effective delivery of goods.

The author structures the book with twelve chapters within a logical sequence wherein each chapter builds on the material discussed in the prior chapter. This is particularly useful for less experienced practitioners or others with limited knowledge of the subject matter. However, each chapter comprehensively focuses on one specific area. Therefore, practitioners with more knowledge and experience can skip to chapters that are more pertinent to their interests or concerns. Each chapter begins with bullet points highlighting the specific points to be learned in the chapter. Each chapter then ends with a brief summary followed by bullet-pointed key points that were covered. This well-organized structure allows the reader to review the key points at the end to determine if he has properly mastered the narrative.

The material covered in the book include aspects of forecasting, effective sales, operations planning, efficient management of inventory, production scheduling, proper utilization of an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, international outsourcing, and the management of a distribution network. There is also a chapter that examines components of an international supply chain.

The author suggests that many contemporary books on supply chain management are primarily solution-focused and attempt to provide one-size-fits-all, formulaic solutions. He argues that every supply chain is unique and that an analysis of problems is a preferable approach since the root causes of problems vary from company to company. Problems regarding improper operations within a supply chain should then be analyzed within the larger context of achieving lean management.

According to the author, lean management is built upon the concept of just-in-time, “the idea that each process should have only what it needs in the quantity it needs when it needs it and no more” (p. 18). Fundamental to lean thinking is the focus on value and waste. As per the author, “value is an activity that adds value to a product, and for which the customer is willing to pay” (p. 19). Waste is defined as “everything that does not add value” and is, therefore, a “non-value-added activity” (p. 19). To understand the full extent of waste within a supply chain, as well as ways to eliminate it, the author devotes seven pages to outline and describe components for the construction of what he refers to as a “value system map” (p. 19).

The author writes clearly with a focus on the organizational presentation of his material. Light on technical jargon, the book is truly a practitioner’s guide with a straightforward approach towards problem identification and resolution. This reviewer, with prior experience in the business world relating to supply chain management, found new and valuable information, especially in the chapters on forecasting (always a big challenge) and on the functions, benefits, limitations, and ultimate selection of an enterprise resource planning system – a software product that is now found in hundreds of variations (regarding scale and capabilities), on the market.

This work is rich with tables to illustrate the text and there are ample references to books and studies for reinforcement of key topics. However, there are only two case studies in the book (in different chapters), both obtained from the author’s business colleagues. Though it was not necessary to have a case study in each of the book’s twelve chapters, at least half of the remaining ten chapters would have been more robust in their presentations with illuminating case studies. Authors who have been practitioners in the world of business have a richness of experience, both personal and from colleagues, to be able to provide such case studies, as opposed to academicians who have had little or no personal experience in hands-on administration and problem solving.