American and European feelings towards Japanese business practices have varied dramatically through the last few decades. In the late 1970s and 1980s, a wave of fear swept through many Western leaders as they contemplated Japan's stunningly rapid rise from the ashes of World War II. Then more recently, as the 1990s and early 2000s saw stagflation gripping the Japanese economy, and knowledge-based innovation in technology and financial services bringing unprecedented prosperity to many Western countries, a feeling of vindication (and sometimes smugness) returned to those same corporate chieftains. Most recently, perhaps, the pendulum of conventional wisdom has begun to swing back to a middle position, in between the extremes of adulation and disdain: respect for the positive contributions of Japanese business culture, without blind acceptance. Its with this spirit that the authors of Lean Solutions offer their insightful observations about process design and service delivery in modern companies.

James Womack and Daniel Jones are well-recognized contributors to the lean-business movement. Lean Solutions is the consultants' fifth book together, following earlier works like Lean Thinking and The Machine That Changed the World, and springs as before from their keen interest in Japanese business methods and philosophy. What compels them to write yet another book, though, given the well-established literature on lean business? The authors offer an intriguing description of their mission at the beginning of this latest book. Principles of lean design have in fact been adopted by many Western businesses, they acknowledge, and manufacturing quality has steadily risen as a result. Yet customers remain often dissatisfied with their experiences. The cause? To Womack and Jones, the answer rests in a myopic application of lean business principles: companies have successfully improved their manufacturing and product-development environments, but they have not had a large enough view of the overall customer relationship, and of the need for leanness in all aspects of companies interactions with customers.
Put another way: in Lean Solutions, readers find a new and much broader conceptualization of how lean-business methods—which, to be fair to Womack and Jones, have evolved so that they can claim a global heritage as much as a Far Eastern one—might apply across entire customer experiences, rather than just manufacturing processes. The structure of Lean Solutions centers on 6 requests that the authors believe customers implicitly demand from their vendors: Solve my problem completely; don't waste my time; provide exactly what I want; deliver value where I want it; supply value when I want it; and reduce the number of decisions I must make to solve my problems. With a compelling mix of case studies, and illuminating thought experiments in industries ranging as widely as shoe manufacturing, health care delivery, auto repair, and grocery shopping, Womack and Jones walk readers through careful explanations of how lean thinking might be expanded beyond the factory floor to broader business problems. Lean Solutions isn't for all readers. It rests on an appreciation of the large cumulative effects that many small processes can have on business, and it requires patience from those who want to learn the secrets of lean business. --Peter Han

My Personal Review:

I have often commented on Lean, and mentioned the fact that Lean derives from the Toyota Production System, and thus from a manufacturing background. I was certainly aware that there were books on Lean Six Sigma for Service, but having glanced at a couple, I wasn't convinced that they had really made the transition to a service orientation. Obviously service companies have backroom operations, and obviously there is waste present in service companies, just as there is in manufacturing operations, so Lean must somehow apply, but I wasn't convinced that reading a book on "Lean for Service" provided any important new ideas. I had a student challenge me on this recently and suggested I read Lean Solutions - a book that James Womack and Daniel Jones - the ultimate Lean gurus - had written in 2005. I hadn't realized that Lean Solutions was focused on the service business, but sat down and read it.

Lean Solutions is a great book that anyone in process work, Lean or otherwise, ought to read! There really are exciting ideas that Lean brings to analyzing service industry problems.

Lean includes a number of different techniques. Among the most prominent are defining a value stream and then examining each step in the value stream to determine how long it takes, if its creating value, and whether it relies on push or pull. The techniques are mixed in with a lot of heuristics, often derived from practices at Toyota. Thus, for example, everyone at Toyota is urged to "always go to the gemba." (a Japanese term for the place where the work is actually done). At Toyota, and in almost all books on the Toyota Production System or on Lean, the gemba is understood to be the factory floor where production processes take place.
What Womack and Jones have done is to imagine a new gemba - the place where the customer lives. (Note that in doing this Womack and Jones have moved beyond Lean as a set of practices derived from the Toyota Production System, and have started to create new Lean techniques for the service industry. (I would suggest that some of what they are doing is what people in the process management tradition have been doing for some time, and one of the reasons people in the process management tradition have thought Lean was limited to manufacturing - but that’s a quibble. They key is that they have arrived at the right solution.)

The essence of Lean Solutions is the following statement: "Customers have a gemba, too. It's the path they follow to solve their problems." In other words, if you want to find out about service processes, you go watch what customers do.

Womack and Jones refer to the customer’s gemba as consumption, and refer to the service company's process as the provision process. (We prefer to refer to the customer’s gemba as the customer process, and the company's process as the business process, but either set of terms will do.)

As Womack and Jones say: "Consumption is a continuing process - a set of actions taken over an extended period - to solve a problem. It involves searching for, obtaining, installing, maintaining, repairing, upgrading, and eventually, disposing of many goods and services.

How does this work in practice? Womack and Jones recommend the following:

*Draw a Consumption Map - a list of the steps in the consumer process. Time each step.
*Determine the value of each step in the consumer process. (The time the consumer wastes.)
*Determine the "perceptual time" of each step. (Is the customer happy or unhappy about waiting.)

Next Womack and Jones turn to the company's provision process (the company's gemba), and they repeat the steps:

*Draw a Provision Map - a list of the steps that the company goes through to provide service to a customer. Time each step.
*Determine the value of each step in the provision process. (The time the consumer wastes.)
*Determine the "perceptual time" of each step. (Is the employee happy or unhappy about the step.)

In each case, the authors first create a list of steps and then shift to a diagram of the steps.
The model shows where both the customer and the provider are wasting time. It does not show where the provider is producing any value time. In essence the redesign strategy is to clean up the customer process, eliminating all possible waste in the consumer process, and then to turn to the provisioning process, adjust it to support the improved customer process, and then finally, to eliminate what waste you still can from the provider process.

At this point I have only considered what Womack and Jones discuss in the first 50 pages of their 350 page book. They go on to discuss how they would systematically improve the customer and then the provider processes and then move on to consider lots of other service processes and to provide lots of good advice on how to deal with a variety of service process problems.

The new ideas of Womack and Jones will create some problems that they fail to address in their book. Throughout the book Womack and Jones focus on processes that have a more or less linear flow: Repairing an Car, a Patient Visiting a Healthcare Facility, an Airplane Trip. Roger Burlton and I have found that the more challenging service processes are those that are non-linear. Consider staying at a hotel. You could break the overall process into lots of little processes: Checking In, Going to a Restaurant, Spending the Night in a Room, Attending a Conference Banquet, etc. The reality, however, is that if you want to analyze this problem effectively, you have to conclude that the overall hotel process is a network and that the customer could go from one specific activity (Check In) to another (Restaurant, or Room, or Conference Lunch) in whatever order the customer chooses, and the good hotel will want to support whatever choice the customer makes. Thus, analyzing the network and determining where there is information that you gain from one activity that can improve the customer"s experience at the next activity, no matter what path the customer chooses, is another key element in analyzing and designing good service processes. It would have been nice to have Womack and Jones address such a process.

A subtler issue also deserved more attention. In essence, when we look at a service problem, we are looking at two processes: the customers process and the service businesses process. Moreover, they are complementary, such that, in many situations, decreasing waste for the customer must necessarily increase waste for the business. Roger Burlton describes a class in which a student trained in Lean insisted that transportation was "waste," and that, therefore, a pizza company should not deliver its pizzas. Roger tried to explain to the student that much of the value of a pizza, for many of us, consisted in its being delivered, but he didn"t convince this particular individual who was determined to eliminate all possible "waste" from the production process. Womack and Jones have solved this problem. The pizza business is a service business. We begin by analyzing the customer"s process and try to make it as efficient as possible. For us, as customers, transportation is waste. We don"t want
to have to travel to pick up the pizza. We want to eliminate the waste by getting the pizza people to deliver our pizza right to our door when we are ready to eat it. As we maximize the value of the customer process, in this case, however, we impose a burden on the pizza company’s production process. To eliminate waste in the customer’s process, the pizza company needs to accept waste in its own process - it needs to deliver the pizza to the customer. Anyone working with customer processes quickly realizes that the effort to make things easier for the

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Lean Solutions: How Companies and Customers Can Create Value and Wealth Together
by Daniel T. Jones - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!