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The genealogy of lean production

Matthias Holweg  

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Abstract

Lean production not only successfully challenged the accepted mass production practices in the automotive industry, significantly shifting the trade-off between productivity and quality, but it also led to a rethinking of a wide range of manufacturing and service operations beyond the high-volume repetitive manufacturing environment. The book “The machine that changed the World”™ that introduced the term “lean production”™ in 1990 has become one of the most widely cited references in operations management over the last decade. Despite the fact that the just-in-time (JIT) manufacturing concept had been known for almost a decade prior, the book played a key role in disseminating the concept outside of Japan. While the technical aspects of lean production have been widely discussed, this paper sets out to investigate the evolution of the research at the MIT International Motor Vehicle Program (IMVP) that led to the conception of the term “lean production”™. Furthermore, the paper investigates why “despite the pre-existing knowledge of JIT” the program was so influential in promoting the lean production concept. Based on iterating series of interviews with the key authors, contributors and researchers of the time, this paper

presents an historical account of the research that led to the formulation and dissemination of one of the most influential manufacturing paradigms of recent times.



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Keywords

Lean manufacturing; Measurement/methodology; Productivity

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