

Getting and Staying Productive

All kinds of processes – those that make things or deliver services or operate companies – can be made more productive, and society's continued well-being requires it. This book is for all those with a stake in improving how companies run. It introduces the concept of “swift, even flow” and explains how that concept stands behind popular business tools such as “lean” principles and Six Sigma. More than that, it shows how swift, even flow can lead to deep, strategic insights and fresh ideas. The book uses many examples, both contemporary and historic, and 16 case studies from all sorts of business situations to demonstrate how swift, even flow can be applied. Services and manufacturing, supply chains and individual operations, product development and outsourcing, strategy and tactics, hourly workers and top level executives – all benefit from this fundamental rethinking of what it takes to become productive.

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Getting and Staying Productive

Applying Swift, Even
Flow to Practice

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For Barbie and our years together

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Preface

Productivity, with its potential and its paradoxes, has gnawed at me for years. For students of operations management, there is no greater issue. Its impact on society has been, and will continue to be, immense.

While the concept of swift, even flow grew, in fits and starts, out of my research over the past 30 years, the urge to apply it has grown out of my teaching and my years as a dean and an academic administrator. My students, mainly evening MBAs, deserved a point of view that they could bring to the nagging problems that they encountered in their day jobs. As a dean and as the chief of staff to the Chancellor at IUPUI, I preached that swift, even flow – which in the academic context means getting students through their degree programs on time – was what we owed them and ourselves. Upon returning to the classroom from my time as an administrator, it dawned on me how so many of the cases in the first-year MBA course could benefit from the perspective that the concept of swift, even flow could bring to them. The idea of a book that told the story of swift, even flow and then applied it relentlessly to a host of management problems took increasing hold of me.

As ever, I owe a debt of gratitude to Indiana University and its Kelley School of Business, on both the IUPUI and the Bloomington campuses, for providing me with the time and the opportunities for study and reflection. Over the years, my colleagues on both campuses have been wonderful. Special mention is due to Bob Hall, who has always been a fountain of stories and insight, and Morgan Swink, whose curiosity first challenged me to put my ideas on swift, even

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flow together. Bob Collins, of IMD in Lausanne, has been instrumental to my internationalization, a benefit both scholastic and personal. My gratitude extends as well to the Judge Business School of the University of Cambridge where I have been able, very pleasantly, to complete the writing.