

Strength Based LEAN Six Sigma: Building positive and engaging business improvement

David Shaked

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Review by Mark McKergow

The arrival of a new business book with a strong Solution Focused (SF) element is always an event to be marked, and David Shaked's work will be welcomed on many fronts. Shaked is the first to set down in book form many ways to apply 'strength based' approaches – SF, Appreciative Inquiry (Ai) and Positive Deviance in this case – to the huge world of LEAN / Six Sigma change. The result is both a good starting point and, we might hope, an opening crack in the stone face of deficit-based work.

The book is laid out in five sections, mirroring an Appreciative Inquiry process. Shaked sets out his stall well in the opening Define section, with well-worked and concise starting points for all the various methodologies he is to consider. The book is clearly aimed at those who are familiar with at least one of these approaches and wish to expand their skills and awareness, rather than complete novices. I also had a sense that the book is (wisely) targetting the large existing LEAN / Six Sigma audience, for whom the whole move towards finding what's working and valuing interaction along with analysis will probably be a very new perspective.

The second section, Discover, becomes a personal story from the author about how he found the benefits of the positive perspective having already trained as a Master Black Belt consultant. There are many personal stories and case studies throughout the book, which adds to the immediacy and connection for the reader. The story of how Shaked first used SF ideas with a reluctant client is a marvellous view of platform building, transforming the situation for all concerned. Throughout the book SF, Ai and Positive

Deviance ideas are used frequently but always identifiably and never confused with each other; this is an excellent achievement that does great justice to the different schools and confirms the author's depth of skill and experience in each of them.

The Dream section comes next, with a look at what a strength-based approach to Lean might look like and how it can all work – even though the classical LEAN/Six Sigma tools are entirely problem and deficit focused. Shaked takes the chance to look at the concrete issue of metrics and measures here, pointing out that we don't need to stop using hard measures but we do need to be aware of what is being measured and the impact which that focus has on the rest of the work.

Actual tools and techniques appear in the fourth Design section of the book. I was very relieved to find them, having felt a need for something more specific as I was reading through the earlier chapters. Shaked takes some classic LEAN tools and adapts them for strength-based use, before devoting a whole chapter to a detailed outline for a potential Kaizen blitz or work-out session. I think that the existing LEAN / Six Sigma audience will find these chapters very useful, and I hope they will persist until they find them well over halfway through the 248 pages. There is a lot to like here – I even enjoyed the 'strength-based' Five Whys activity.

The final section, Deliver/Destiny, looks at how to actually introduce strength-based approaches to highly deficit-focused organisations. This is another terrific section, where Shaked shares his own not-always-successful initial attempts and reveals some great lessons – not least of which is that if you present something to consultants trained to spot weaknesses and inefficiency, that is exactly what they will do! Another chapter in this section gives four detailed case studies from other consultants, which are a valuable source of learning about both practicalities and overall strength-based orientation. The book is well laid-out, with the case studies in smaller type, which allows a good deal of detail to be included without swamping the main textual progression.

It's high time that a book like this reached the market place,

and I am pleased to say that David Shaked has done a fine job. He does justice to all the strength-based approaches, no mean feat, while encouraging a large and well-identified new audience to look at SF and Ai with fresh eyes. This is a book which will go straight into my small library collection for taking around to trainings and keynotes to show how SF ideas are spreading and making a difference on a wider and wider stage.

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