
Book Review

“Operations Management: Theory and Practice”

B. Mahadevan.

Delhi: Pearson Education. 2007

612 pages. ISBN: 81-7758-564-9. Rs. 325 (paperback)

Reviewed by

Nitin Agarwal

Indian Institute of Management, Indore

“Operations Management: Theory and Practice” by B. Mahadevan is a new book on the subject and a part of ongoing effort by Indian Academic community to explain key OM concepts in Indian context. As the author says in the preface that “While several books on the subject by international authors are available, students find it difficult to relate to examples used in them.The basic motivation for the bookby preserving all the salient features one normally finds in the International books and at the same time populate the book with contextually relevant examples”. The key tool used by the author to achieve this objective is to use “Ideas at Work”. They are mostly short anecdotes drawn from the business press, leading Indian management journals and authors’ own research. This is an important contribution in bringing Indian context into OM teaching in the classroom and author should be congratulated for that.

The book is divided into 5 major sections namely Understanding Operations, Designing Operations, Planning and Control of Operations, Operations and the Value Chain and finally, Maintaining/Improving Operations. In all, the book covers most of the topics, which are normally taught in an Operations Management classes in a management school in India. The book is written in textbook mode with number of worked out examples, summary, review questions and problems. Though the number of problems at the end of chapters can be increased and be made more varied, there is enough even now for people to try it out.

The book suffers from several major shortcomings. The first and foremost is the lack of cases. It contradicts author's own stated goal of preserving salient features found normally in International books. Most international books currently used in OM classes have cases. One would hope that author will remove this lacuna in the future editions. The other major shortcoming is in the organization of the book. Most OM books are structured on the lines of Design, Operations and Improvement of Operations paradigm. Author has also followed a similar paradigm. But, the choice of topics under these major headings is questionable. For example, to put Quality and SPC under design (and not under Improvement) will stretch the thinking of most OM teachers. Similarly, keeping Project Management so far away from the discussion of other OM processes does not seem right. Since the structure of the book often gives students idea about the relative placement of various topics in the overall scheme of things for understanding the concepts purposes, it should be carefully thought out. Lastly, there are some confusing introductions of new terms, which can throw a new student of the subject off-guard. For example, on page 66, the author describes Jumbled Flow Systems (a non-standard term probably coined by the author himself) and treats project process and job shop as two sub topics implying that these two constitute Jumbled Flow Systems. However, on page 69, in the figure 3.8 about Product-Process matrix, Jumbled Flow is treated synonymously to Job-shop. In this context, it is important to remember that many researchers in fact treat Project Process as the fifth process on the Product-Process matrix. Such conflicting depictions can be confusing to beginners of the subject who are the targeted audience of the book.

In all, one can say that the author has made an important and original contribution in teaching of OM to Indian students and we all will greatly benefit from the effort.