

*For my parents*

*Judy Vidal and Lou and Connie Vidal*

*and my parents-in-law*

*Kay and Ron Christensen*

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## ABSTRACT

How are firms in the United States manufacturing sector, particularly smaller suppliers, contributing and responding to economic globalization? Mainstream approaches in both economics and sociology predict tendencies toward organizational homogeneity as market and institutional forces, respectively, discipline firms into adopting the profit-maximizing or normative organizational model. I argue that lean production, *adopted as a comprehensive package of complementary lean practices*, is both the most efficient and the normatively dominant model. Yet, I find that the transition from Fordist mass production is not leading to convergence around this comprehensive model of lean but is resulting in a nontrivial diversity of organizational forms, many of which are *relatively inefficient* yet apparently *stable*. These intermediate organizational forms, many of which are relatively inefficient, are stable in the face of market pressures because, although failing to transform into world class-lean organizations, the changes they do make are *good enough* to meet the aspiration levels of satisficing managers and the performance targets of industrial customers.

To explain this diversity of intermediate cases I develop an organizational political economy framework, focusing on the politics of production within firms and relations of production between firms. The politics of production – satisficing in the development and implementation of strategy, organizational conflict, and workplace culture embedded in routines – operate as a set of polymorphic causal forces generating discretionary and nondiscretionary differences in how lean gets implemented. Managers vary in how they envision lean and how they interpret their organizational environment. Further, managers often must negotiate change

with individuals and factions, and accommodate the norms, conventions and dispositions of workers.

The dissertation also shows that the supply side of the market for durable goods is constituted in multiplex ways by institutional relations of production between firms. Lean production continues to exist and be used at a technical level, but having diffused widely in the manufacturing sector, lean also has multiple institutional moments, for example, existing as a normative model often divorced from complexities of implementation. Further, customer-supplier relations are institutionalized in many ways that create space for diversity in supplier performance.

