Most startups fail. But many of those failures are preventable. The Lean Startup is a new approach being adopted across the globe, changing the way companies are built and new products are launched. Eric Ries, founder of IMVU, articulates his new approach, and provides examples of how real-world companies work in environments of extreme uncertainty, and build better products through constant experimentation and innovation.

Why you'll like it: real-world application. thought-provoking. business innovation. better, faster business decisions. experimentation

About the Author: Eric Ries is the author of the popular blog Startup Lessons Learned and the creator of the Lean Startup methodology. He co-founded and served as CTO of IMVU, his third startup, which has today has over 40 million users and 2009 revenue over $22 million. An entrepreneur in residence at Harvard Business School and a frequent speaker at business events, he advises startups on business and product strategy using the Lean Startup approach.

Questions for Discussion

1. One thing that Lean Startup describes is a ‘culture of experimentation,’ where smaller bets lead to increased knowledge, and that knowledge is acted upon, but this isn’t the way we normally do business. How can one develop a ‘culture of experimentation’ in a business? What would the concrete steps you’d need to take to make that happen?

2. Much of what we talk about in Lean Startup is useless unless the senior management of a company buys into the idea. How can we ensure that management would buy in, even though the efficiencies of its methodology are different than common ones?

3. Failure is just as much a part of experimentation culture as success is. In fact, one could make the argument that failure is even more essential to eventual success than victories. But we don’t live in a society that celebrates failure as a chance to learn. How can you keep up a company’s morale when experiments invalidate ideas, even though they took a great deal of work and preparation? How do you keep people from thinking that they’re not learning, but just throwing away work?

4. One of the best concepts in Lean Startup is the idea of the MVP, or Minimum Viable Product. This is the basis of all experimentation and future success. However, the MVP is exactly that: the minimum. Such a product might not even work correctly or have a functionality far from the envisioned end product. With that in mind, how can you keep an MVP from damaging your brand while still allowing for the experimentation needed for future success?
5. On first read, *Lean Startup* seems like a book written for primarily tech startups. Tech companies can easily experiment and fix problems digitally. But the techniques Ries described here can be applied to all sorts of companies, not just in the tech world. How could a lean startup mentality help non-tech companies?

6. *Lean Startup* seems like a hard sell for the nonprofit world; after all, there’s little room for failure and experimentation when you receive a grant and the funders want results. How could a lean startup methodology be implemented in the nonprofit world?

7. Describe an example of ‘innovation accounting,’ and how that would play a role in your own business.

8. This book is dealing with a great number of different concepts, from the MVP to conscious experimentation to innovation accounting. Which do you think would most help you in your career?

9. How did Lean Startup change the way you think about how we do business as a nation and as a community?


11. Would you recommend that other people read this book? Why or why not?

12. How does Lean Startup connect with other work you’ve read in terms of business? Do you think this book stands out as a business book?