

W. Edwards Deming – A Quality Paradox

A deeper truth and insight



TIM J CLARK

JAN 15, 2026



Share



W. Edwards Deming's contributions to improving product and service quality were recognized by *Fortune* magazine as "among the 20 that have shaped the modern world of business", and by *U.S. News and World Report* as "one of nine turning points in history. The top turning point was identified as the Apostle Paul, whose preaching eloquent writings led to the mass acceptance of Christianity."

“If I had to reduce my message for management to just a few words, I’d say it all had to do with reducing variation.” Henry R. Neave, The Deming Dimension (Knoxville, TN: SPC Press Inc., 1990), p. 57

Although Deming was a devout Christian, he supported a secular approach to improvement and did not explicitly share his religious beliefs. This secular framing continues to be supported by the [W. Edwards Deming Institute](#).

Deming’s exceptions to references to spirituality included Bible quotes in his book, [“Out of the Crisis.”](#) Another implied reference to Christianity was in the first edition of his last book. In [“The New Economics for Industry, Government, and Education,”](#) Deming was subtle in using the term “metanoia” to describe the required transformation.

“The word metanoia is more suitable than transformation. Metanoia is a Greek word which means penitence, repentance, reorientation of one’s way of life, spiritual conversion” (emphasis mine). (Deming, The New Economics, first edition, 1991, p 95).

The “spiritual conversion” links to Christ’s reference to the need to be “born again” (John 1:3)

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs You are doing if God were not with him.” (1 John 1:2)

Jesus replied, “Truly, truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (1 John 3)

Deming died in 1993. In later editions of “The New Economics,” references to *metanoia* were replaced with the phrase “The First Step.” The language changed, but the depth of the required transformation remained.

A New Method for Improvement and Learning

Citizenship, Quality Management, Christianity

At the foundation of Deming's approach to continuous improvement is the [Plan-Do-Study-Act \(PDSA\) Cycle](#) with the aim of learning through action and reducing variation from the ideal, moving toward what is “more perfect.”

Citizenship

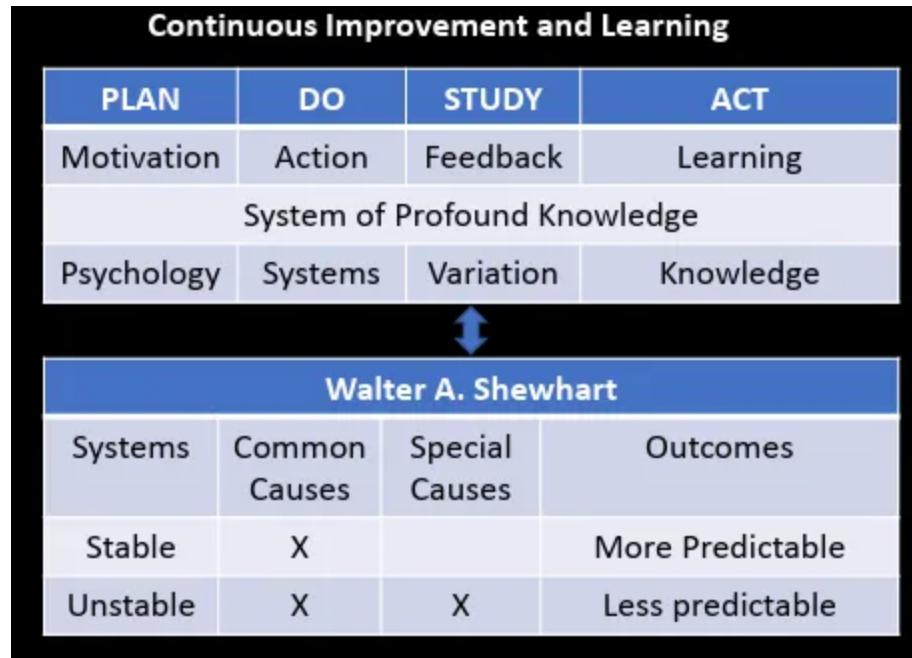
The U.S. Constitution enables *We the People* to work toward “*a more perfect Union*.” *Perfect* can be understood as a condition in which needs are consistently met—something attainable only through continuous improvement, which is achieved by reducing variation.

In this system, citizens are effectively the top management. If outcomes are unacceptable (for example, out-of-control debt), responsibility rests with citizens to change the system and study whether those changes lead to improvement.

Quality Management

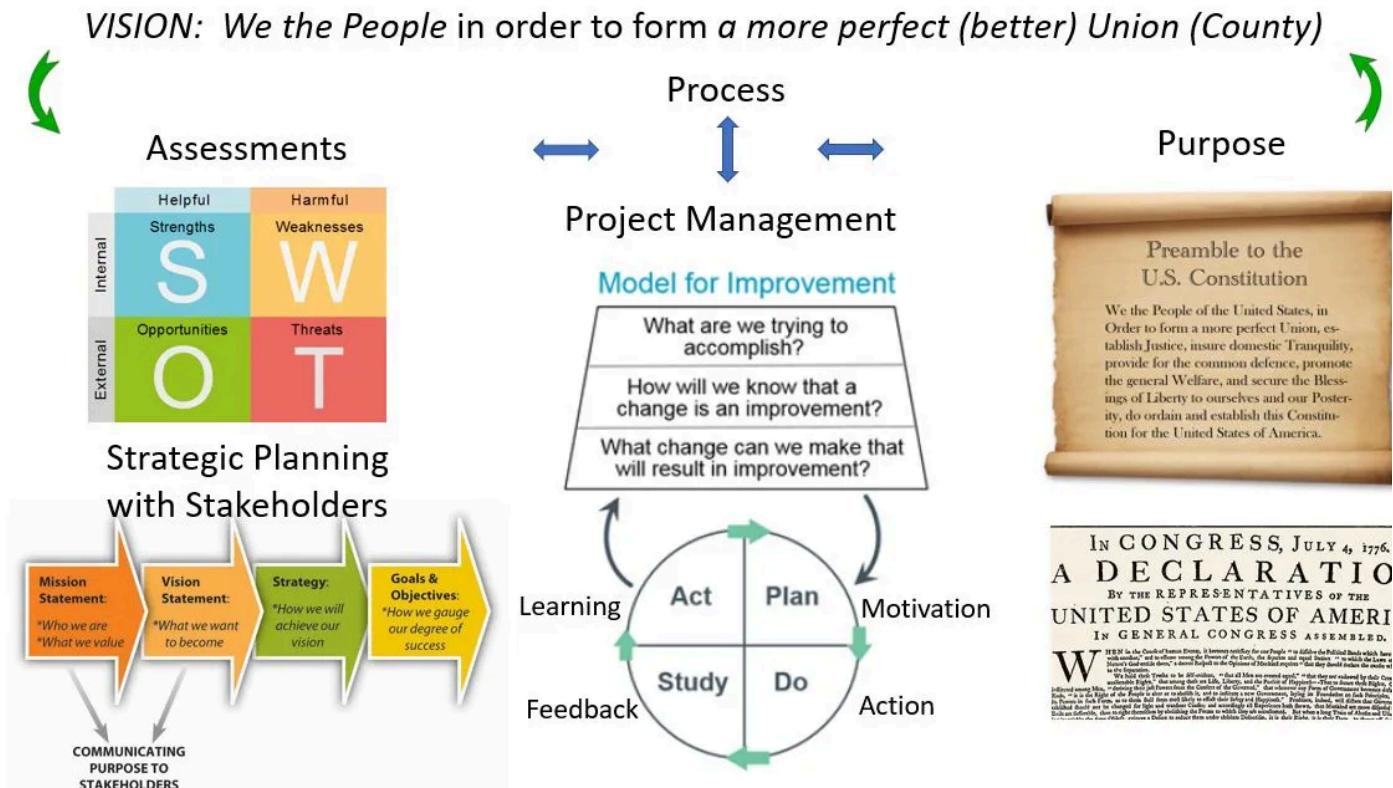
In discussions of goals and objectives, Deming would emphasize the importance of method that includes an understanding of variation. Deming estimated that, without this awareness and understanding, 95% of changes would result in no improvement.

The PDSA method, which aligns with Deming's System of Profound Knowledge and builds on Walter Shewhart's contributions in managing variation, is presented in the following matrix. This “New method” can be applied by *We the People* in working towards that *more perfect Union* by reducing variation.



Continuous Improvement and Learning Matrix: Reference: [God's Insiders](#).

Concept of how all this can apply at the local level of government. (IHI: Model for Improvement)



Christianity and Systems Thinking

God is love. Love is not an emotion; it is an **action** – willing the good of others.

In a quality management context, all **actions occur within** processes, and processes operate within systems. A system is a collection of processes with a common aim, a systems largely determine outcomes.

For example, commuting to work or school is not merely an individual act. It depends on an interconnected transportation system: roads, bridges, traffic control and means (trains, planes, automobiles), public safety, and emergency services. Outcomes are systemic.

Motivation in a Christian context comes from one of two sources. Christ or the antichrist :

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is not the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

As Mathew Kelly describes in his book, [The Three Ordinary Voices of God](#):

God speaks to us. He has been speaking to us from the beginning. There is a temptation to think, “Well, God spoke to people in the Bible, and he spoke to some medieval saints and mystics, but he doesn’t speak to me.” Wrong.

God speaks to everyone—whether we are aware of it or not—through three ordinary voices: OUR NEEDS, OUR TALENTS, and OUR DESIRES. We yearn for God’s direction. We want to hear his voice. We know his will is the path to the peace, joy, and happiness we hunger for. But how do we discover his will?

God yearns to speak to you. Will you listen?

Additional Information:

- History and overview of the quality principles, methods, and basic tools available at: SuccessThroughQuality.com
- American Society for Quality (ASQ): [Law of Variation](#)
- Reference to Deming's religious beliefs: "[Deming The Way We Knew Him](#)," Chapter 14, pg. 155-165. 1st Edition by Frank Voehl
- Paradox: A paradox is a statement or situation that seems self-contradictory or illogical but **may reveal a deeper truth or insight**. It often challenges conventional thinking and highlights contradictions in reasoning or understanding. (Wikipe

Discussion about this post

[Comments](#) [Restacks](#)



Write a comment...

