

BACK TO THE FUTURE

William Deming's 14 principles for management can transform the quality and effectiveness of business, argues **Andrew Sharman**.

Twenty years ago as a young engineer, my remit – alongside safety, health and the environment – also included quality.

At that time there was a concerted effort to drive the four disciplines together into one framework. I was told that because each could be managed with systems and frameworks it made sense to save time, effort and resource to have them fall under the responsibility of one department.

As a naïve youngster I nodded enthusiastically and got on with my work, enjoying the mix of activities in which I became engaged and sucked up the opportunity to broaden my skills base.

Since that time, the trend for integration appears to have reversed and for many organisations the four strands have become separated back out into specialist functions.

My own career progressed in a similar way – principally focusing on safety and risk, with peers taking on the baton for quality. I've continued to observe strong synergies between the disciplines, however.

Immediately following the recent global financial crisis, I picked up a book that I thought might inspire some new thinking.

Its title – *Out of the crisis* – certainly resonated even though the book had been around a while. Written in 1982 by William Edwards Deming, it argued that in order for organisations to succeed they needed only two things – commitment and an ability to open themselves up to new thinking.

Deming, considered by many as the 'father of quality', went on to articulate 14 principles for management to follow in order to significantly transform both the quality and the effectiveness of their business:

1. Adopt a new philosophy – we are in a new economic age, management must awaken to the challenge, learn their responsibilities and take on leadership for change.
2. Create constancy of purpose towards improvement of products and services, with the aim to become competitive and to stay in business. Decide to whom top management is responsible.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality. Eliminate the need for inspection on a mass basis by building quality into the product in the first place.

4. End the practice of awarding business on the basis of price tag.
5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service, to improve quality and productivity, and continuously decrease costs.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Institute clear leadership. The aim of supervision is to help people and machines and gadgets to do a better job.
8. Drive out fear so that everyone may work effectively and efficiently.
9. Break down barriers between departments.
10. Eliminate slogans and targets for the workforce asking for zero defects and new levels of productivity. These only create adversarial relationships.
11. Eliminate work quotas on the factory floor. Eliminate management by numbers and numerical goals.
12. Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of his right to pride of workmanship.
13. Institute a vigorous programme of education and self-improvement.
14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job.

As I read Deming's propositions, a bell rang loudly in my head. The same is happening right now. Over 30 years after they were written, Deming's principles are as relevant today as they were then. In fact, arguably, Deming's principles are more relevant today than they were when originally published.

Nowadays, in a world where change is the new normal and business transformation is core to survival, these 14 points offer a clear framework for success. What's more, they provide us not just with guidance on improving quality, but also help us to create a robust roadmap for driving sustainable workplace safety improvements and building a robust organisational culture. Perfect – with or without a DeLorean. ■

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