

QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS  
WHILE READING  
*DEMING'S PROFOUND CHANGES*<sup>1</sup>

(KEYED TO CHAPTER AND SECTION NUMBERS)

**In Memoriam: W. Edwards Deming** What “cargo cults” have influenced your organization’s current thinking and habits? Why is it so difficult to challenge them? Why—even among scientists—is Feynman’s challenge routinely ignored? Why is cargo-cult irrationality more seductive to senior management than to operational personnel?

**1.1** Examine the positions of some of the well-known personalities in the “quality” field: do they address any of the broader or underlying issues? What are their personal philosophies (discovered by word or by example)? Compare theirs critically to Deming’s: what did you discover?

**2.1** In a July-August 1993 *Harvard Business Review* article J. M. Juran, a quality-management practitioner who gained the ear of some Japanese management about four years after Deming began, said he felt Japan would have become an industrial giant even if Deming and he had not taught there; that Japan had a long tradition of producing quality goods, and that all the two of them had done was to provide a “jump start.” In view of Deming’s insistence that the theory required for transformation must come from outside the system, how do you react to Juran’s thesis?

**2.2** Your manager tells you that he and some of his peers are going on a trip next month for ten days, to visit organizations like yours and learn some of their best practices. Their itinerary was drawn up by some senior managers. What advice could you give him in order for your company to gain the most benefit from his trip? Should you accompany him? Should you advise him to delay, or not make the trip at all? (This question may be asked again.)

**2.3** What are Taylor’s principles? Given that they have become organic in western management, why would a top Japanese industrialist seem to be so familiar with them? (Hint: note 22 on page 43)

**2.4** If you are in school, do some research on its business curricula: is Taylor mentioned in any of the course descriptions? Whose ideas *are* mentioned?

**2.5** How many of the examples listed in this chapter under Flaws of Scientific Management apply to your company (or school)? How do your management justify such practices? Without referring specifically to Deming or his sayings to buttress your argument, critique the three of these examples you consider the greatest causes of problems in your organization.

**2.6** Taylor’s version of Axiom 2 (Division and Concurrency of Work) and Deming’s are both very similar. Why might this be the case?

**2.7** Should management be an art or a science? Compare the opinions in Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* and Max DePree’s *Leadership is an Art*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Deming’s Profound Changes—When Will The Sleeping Giant Awaken?* by Kenneth T. Delavigne and J. Daniel Robertson; Prentice Hall, 1994. ISBN 0-13-292690-3

**3.1** In a good dictionary look up the Latin root of the word “profound”: what does it mean? Why is it a good choice to describe the changes Deming called for? What other terms would be appropriate synonyms?

**4.1** What is “Total Quality Management”? Why do you think Deming disavowed the term, saying he didn’t know what it is? Choose five practitioners of TQM, and compare their programs and philosophies to Deming’s. Compare each to the others’ as well.

**4.2** Read Chris Argyris’ book *Overcoming Organizational Defenses*: discuss how his ideas of what is required for organizational learning fit, or don’t fit, with Deming’s notion of transformation. How could knowledge (by Argyris) of Deming’s philosophy have made this an even-more effective book?

**4.2** The ISO 9000 quality standard, a trade barrier erected by the EEC, has become a popular theme in the U.S. What are the dangers of extension transference as they apply to ISO 9000? Has ISO become a manipulated symbol? Why (not)?

**4.2** Do you know of any companies which have improved *beyond* ISO minimums? Why do ISO–certified companies seem to level out at mere compliance? Expand this discussion to include the limitations of compliance in general as a basis for quality. How, for example, does this affect you as a purchaser from such a company?

**4.3** Some organizations conduct a meeting at the end of each project to discuss what went wrong and what lessons were learned, now that the pressure of meeting targets is over. What constraints do such meetings place on gaining or spreading new knowledge for the organization. How could the underlying theory of this process be stated in terms of a set of operating assumptions? In your experience, do such meetings have any lasting value? Why? What changes could be made to increase their value? (Hint: PDSA)

**6.1** Francis Bacon (1561–1626) once said, “Truth emerges more readily from error than from confusion.” How does this sixteenth-century wisdom hold up under She-whart’s and Deming’s ideas? (Hint: Feynman’s ideas)

**6.2** Many managers, as well as workers, work long hours of overtime. In your experience, what are these overtime hours used for? Do they increase throughput or reduce overhead? If not, then why aren’t regular working hours sufficient? Why is working harder unlikely to solve the West’s industrial problems?

**6.3** Does vertical integration increase or decrease complexity? When would vertical integration be a better idea than a single-supplier relationship? What factors could be used to aid a decision? (Hint: core competence)

**6.4** Just as with suppliers, the greater the number of customers you have, the greater the complexity: in what ways could this complexity be reduced? Same question for creating and maintaining multiple versions of your product.

**6.5** Which of the six dimensions of complexity presented in this chapter is most problematic to you in your personal life? What actions might you take to reduce its effect?

**6.6** In terms of the four methods in the Funnel Experiment, how does your organization conduct such activities as budgeting, staffing and setting of goals?

**6.7** How does application of the PDSA cycle reduce complexity?

**6.7** Have you ever improved a process, only to find later that, once you went away, things reverted to their previous state? How might the concept of context level have been applied to reduce (not eliminate) the likelihood of that backward slide?

**6.7** Does documenting a process improve it? What should be documented—the actual process, the process you really want, or a blend of the two?

**6.7** Can improvement ever be “continuous”? (Hint: how many elements of the PDSA cycle actually improve anything?)

**6.8** How does your organization promote factionalization? Are the results healthy or unhealthy?

**6.9** What is a “core competence”? How does a company attain it? Why should a company not relinquish its core competence? What principles of economics would be involved? (Hint: Ricardo)

**6.10** How do people learn their jobs in your organization—through formal training, or on-the-job training (OJT)—which usually means little more than “trial and error”? Why does training reduce context level? List several ways in which OJT increases complexity and variability?

**6.11** “We never have time to do it right, but we always have time to do it over.” Is this statement true for your organization? If not, what *does* happen?

**7.1** Who benefits when one buys a foreign-made product—or in any exchange freely chosen by the parties thereto? Show logically why your answer is true.

**7.2** Why, in an era of stupendous Federal deficits, loss of American prestige, failed military adventures, political and corporate scandal at the highest levels, government repression of business, etc., do so many Americans feel guilty when they buy something that wasn’t made in America? Is patriotism an issue here? Does this irrational emotion prevent them from buying?

**8.2** Does division of labor have any point of diminishing returns? How many ways can you split *your own* time and still be effective at each? After you ponder that question for a while, consider what Gerald M. Weinberg says in his book *Quality Software Management—Volume I, Systems Thinking* (Dorset House, 1992):

A rule of thumb can help when estimating the effects of splitting tasks. The following rule is what I use:

<b>Number of Tasks</b>	<b>% of Time on Each</b>
1	100
2	40
3	20
4	10
5	5
More than 5	random

**9.1** Most managers seem busy all the time; many require appointments in advance even for their own subordinates to confer with them. What are the effects of lack of excess capacity in management?

**10.1** Where we see “just-in-time” (JIT) processing, is JIT the *cause* of reduced complexity, or instead one of its *effects*? Why? In what ways may attempting to “install” such a program be an extension transference?

**11.1** Gerald Weinberg's Zeroth Law of Software is "If the software doesn't have to work, you can always meet any other requirements." Why is this true? Does your organization demand, either by policy or by example, that products have to work, or are other requirements ranked higher? What are those other requirements?

**11.2** Given the remoteness of ownership in companies whose stock is publicly-traded, what would be the arguments for, and against, eliminating the corporate form of business for future companies?

**11.3** Why is the individual so important to Deming?

**11.4** Have you ever had a job in which you could take joy in the work? What were the elements and aspects which made this job different from others? Compare notes with a colleague or a friend who works in a different industry.

**11.5** Why is mere experience in the work being managed an inadequate preparation to become a manager of that work? On the other hand, why is *lack* of experience with the work an obstacle to effective management? (One approach to the latter question is to approach it as an issue in context levels.)

**Appendix B.** When is it wise to have a single supplier for an item? In such a relationship what are the obligations that customer and supplier have to one another?

**(General)** Two of the most-frequently-asked questions at Deming seminars was, "How can I sell this philosophy to my top management?" and "How long will it take me?" Should one "sell" it at all? What obligations do sellers have?

**(General)** Even advocates of Deming often search for examples, anecdotes and "success" stories as ammunition to use in convincing their management to adopt Deming's ideas. Why is this a bad idea? What should be done for management instead?

Now that you've come to the end of these questions, follow Deming's advice: go back and take up the first discussion question again.