

**A Response to Smith and Steen's article,
"Deming's Philosophy of Transformation:
A Christian Critique"
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Dr. Winston offers a response to Smith and Steen's presentation of W.E. Deming's concept of transformation in management. Smith and Steen prepared an excellent base for readers to see Dr. Deming's concept of adopting the new philosophy, transformation, and continual improvement, as a parallel to the acceptance of Christ in one's life, a transformation in one's life, and the process of sanctification in one's life. This article argues for a change in Smith and Steen's view of the nature of man and the subsequent change in logic that flows into Dr. Deming's concept of transformation. If man is seen as starting from a fallen state but has the capacity and desire to improve to a higher state, then Smith and Steen's logic changes to accepting Dr. Deming's transformation as a parallel in the organization to the spiritual transformation when one accepts Jesus.

My purpose in writing is two-fold. The first is to praise Smith and Steen for their article on Dr. William Edwards Deming's philosophy of transformation as viewed through a Christian's filter. The second is to offer a slightly different tint to the filter. I have uncovered overwhelming circumstantial evidence supporting the strong biblical approach to Dr. Deming's writings. It is unfortunate for us who seek a biblical integration in business that Dr. Deming did not write his own Christian apologetic to his management principles. Since he did not, it is left to interested academicians to debate views on the subject.

In this article I wish to recount the key items of Smith and Steen's article and make a case for a slightly different view of transformation leading to a stronger commitment of teachers of Christian business students to Dr. Deming's concept.

Review of Smith and Steen's Article

Smith and Steen describe transformation using the Greek noun *metanoia* and the verb *metanoeo*. Smith and Steen accurately quote Dr. Deming when they say that transformation requires profound knowledge from outside the system. This is the same that occurs with most

people in a conversion to Christ. Rarely do we read accounts of people coming to know Jesus on their own. Usually there is a crisis that forces people to seek outside assistance, or something forces outside assistance on them. The latter may not be a negative event. Much of witnessing and mission work falls into the latter description. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 1-9) is an example of outside intervention. Deming maintained an emphasis on outside intervention throughout his teachings. Boulding suggests that a systems change requires a person to move one system level higher to understand the lower system changes (1956), which is why Deming said that knowledge comes from outside the system. (Deming, 1993).

Deming's concept of transformation also requires the understanding of his fourteen principles. While this article does not permit me to comment on all the principles, two and fourteen are particularly applicable. Point two calls each person to adopt the new philosophy, and point fourteen calls each organization to put everybody to work to accomplish the transformation. These two points parallel the idea of beginning a spiritual transformation by hearing the Word and acting upon it (Acts 4:4, Romans 10:17, Ephesians 1:13, Hebrews 4:2, and

James 1:22-23). One must hear the word of transformation, adopt it as the new philosophy of life and then begin action to make it alive in one's life. We find the importance of transformation in Anderson, Rungtusanatham, and Schroeder's (1994) model of Deming's fourteen points. The model begins with visionary leadership emphasizing transformation.

Smith and Steen indicate concern about Deming's concept of transformation since the concept must occur at an organizational level while spiritual transformation occurs in an individual (28, 30). Deming's view of an organization was that of a collection of individuals like a family. This is very much like what Mary Parker Follett (1924) advocated. Acts 16:15 and 1 Corinthians 1:16 tell of households transforming to Christ after the transformation of the head of the household. Ephesians 2:19 describes the community of believers as a household. Deming followed this same thinking when he taught that management must begin the transformation (1993). To this regard, Smith and Steen refer to Deming's teaching to the *kei-dan-ren* in 1950 (26) as evidence that you must start at the top. In a conference paper on bringing TQM to academia, Mullin, Wilson, and Grelle (1993) listed the first lesson learned from the experience as being the need

to change the paradigm of what an institution of learning is, what constitutes success, and the process by which this occurs. Mullin, Wilson, and Grelle's lesson constitutes transformation at the organizational level. For the transformation to occur, it begins with the head of the organization and flows outward to all organizational participants. The head of the household, or organization, should direct the actions of the household (Deming, 1993, 128, 129). How one views the nature of man determines what effect the head of the household may have on the organization.

View of the Nature of Man

Smith and Steen reference the influence of Frederick Taylor, B. F. Skinner and John Dewey on the mindset of today's organizational leaders (29). Taylor and Skinner ignored both the cognitive and affective differentiation of people. Taylor considered the change in work methods and the use of financial rewards as motivators (Weisbord, 1991). Considering the level of Taylor's workers on Maslow's or Alderfer's hierarchy, Taylor was probably right. Skinner considered only the external environment factors on motivation (1971). Dewey (1966) considered the humanistic view of mankind as the only view.

Smith and Steen leave out the

opposing view from Follet, Barnard, Mayo, McGregor, Argyris, Kahn, and many others who propose that man has the potential for good and, left to his own will, strives to improve. Deming's admonition to managers (1993, 128-130) follows McGregor's (1960) thoughts. I might add that the circumstantial evidence of McGregor's reliance on Christian principles behind his organizational concepts is overwhelming as well. Argyris' (1978) concept of double loop learning follows Deming's concept of organizational improvement. Mayo (1933) stressed that workers must first be understood as human beings. Mayo's comment does not help us understand the spiritual aspect of the person, but considering the context that prior to Mayo's time we saw employees as cogs in a machine ignoring both the mental and spiritual aspects. Mayo called us to understand the whole person. Deming's philosophy (Hackman & Wageman, 1995) rests on the belief that:

employees naturally care about the quality of work they do and will take initiatives to improve it—so long as they are provided with the tools and training that are needed for quality improvement, and management pays attention to their ideas (311).

Grant, Shani, and Krishnam (1994) argue that TQM, and specifically Deming's philosophy, is tangential to the traditional economic models of management such as contract theory, shareholder value maximization, and transactions cost theory. Deming suggested the firm's role, "rather than to make money, is to stay in business and provide jobs through innovation, research, constant improvement, and maintenance" (Walton, 1986, 34). Tying this into what Follett, McGregor, Argyris, and Mayo wrote illustrates a view of man different from what Smith and Steen propose.

This opposing view of the nature of man is the basis for my challenge to Smith and Steen's article. After presenting a view on the nature of man, Smith and Steen advise their readers to be cautious in three areas: (1) realize that employees need to accept more responsibility for performance than Deming alludes, (2) use care in defining success, and (3) see the struggle as spiritual (different from what Deming proposes).

Employees' Responsibility

Deming (1993) advocated that 85 percent of the problems in an organization were the result of system problems under management's domain. Smith and Steen indicate that this allows the non-manager to get off too easy.

This is the same logic as saying the glass is half-full or half-empty. It depends on how you view Deming's statement. Employees work within a system of producing goods or services. Deming taught two types of variation: special and common. Employees who deliberately seek to cause harm to the organization either through soldiering, as Taylor would describe slacking, or sabotage represent special variation. These special causes are dealt with one at a time. Correction usually entails the use of training, indoctrination, or removal from the workplace. All other variation is common variation. Here, the system causes the problems for employees.

All of us need only to look at our academic institutions to see examples of system problems that prevent us from being our best at teaching, research, and the like. From purchasing to tenure restrictions, from research-teaching ratios to endless committee meetings, etc., some things keep us from reaching maximum performance. These system problems are the responsibility of management, according to Deming. Deming did not intend to remove all responsibility from employees, but rather to place the appropriate responsibility on the appropriate person (Stevens, 1994).

Deming's View of Success
 Deming (1993) indicated that the outcome of living by his fourteen principles would be joy in the workplace. My current research into Galatians 5 and the fruit of the Spirit parallels what Deming said. The outcome of living by universal spiritual principles is joy in the workplace. Among other outcomes are love, peace, and all the other descriptors of the fruit of the Spirit. Because Deming did not specifically mention all the measures of success that we, as Christian business faculty, would like, does not imply that Dr. Deming did not consider them important. Deming's fourteen principles include references to building up the body by tearing down the barriers between employees and

departments, removing fear in the workplace, establishing leadership rather than supervision, and removing the barriers that

prevent others from doing what they are called to do. These all fit a scriptural definition of success.

Deming's definition of the role of business, stated earlier as: "rather than to make money, is to stay in business and provide jobs through innovation, research, constant improvement, and maintenance" (Walton, 1986, 34),

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implies a measure of success different than the traditional economic model of business. While Deming did not state that business should "bring Glory to God," there is nothing in his definition that prevents this. Thus, while Scripture does not particularly support Deming's concept, neither does Scripture condemn Deming's view.

Spirituality in the Workplace
 Smith and Steen, at the end of their article, write, "We must go beyond what Deming outlines in his writings on leadership and change and embrace a fuller understanding of depth and implications of transformation." I find the statement interesting since, if Deming's work is seen as an outline, one must fill in the

sections well before going beyond. I disagree with Smith and Steen here. I wonder how long it will take us to

understand the depth of what Deming gave us in his "outline." Researchers such as Anderson, Rungtusanatham, and Schroeder (1994); Grant, Shani, and Krishnam (1994); and Hackman and Wageman (1995) seek to create some empirical support for what Deming taught. We must first understand the heart of what

Deming taught before we can seek empirical evidence.

G. K. Chesterton said, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." The same can be said for Dr. Deming's principles. I have yet to find a set of beliefs about management more in line with a scriptural worldview than Dr. Deming's. I encourage Smith and Steen and others in our academy to continue studying Dr. Deming's philosophy. I am convinced all of us will find scriptural support for all of what Dr. Deming wrote.

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