

Ongoing Discussion “Thought Piece”

Leading with Variation

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Ongoing Discussion Host: Bill Bellows

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Whilst many of us are aware of the variety of weaknesses with the prevailing style of management, it is not an easy task to engage with Management in a company and set them on a different path. Why?

In The New Economics, Dr Deming put forward a theory of management which he called a System of Profound Knowledge, which is now known in the Deming community as SoPK. In quoting from The New Economics,

“The layout of profound knowledge appears here in four parts, all related to each other:

- *Appreciation for a system*
- *Knowledge about variation*
- *Theory of knowledge*
- *Psychology*

One need not be eminent in any part nor in all four parts in order to understand it and apply it. “

If I used the terminology, System of Profound Knowledge or SoPK, in my present company, I would get quizzical looks and likely be escorted off site by people in white coats.

And if I mentioned Deming's esteemed work in Japan post war and in America in the 1980s, I would be asked if there was not something a little more up to date – perhaps Lean and Six Sigma?

So how does an employee best infiltrate a company and change the present way of operating? Deming provided four doorways (parts), not to mention their relationships, when viewing them as a system. Starting with the parts taken separately, which doorway do you walk through first?

When I joined my present company I decided to begin with “Knowledge about variation”. Why?

At the first weekly management meeting I attended, all the managers had to stand in front of a wall chart and explain their figures for the previous week. If they had met their target they were praised and, if they didn't, they had to provide an explanation. Naturally, the explanations sounded very plausible!

There was no context to the figures they were reporting. Every piece of data that appeared “bad” was deemed “special”.

So I decided to start my infiltration by *Leading with Variation*. I will give an update on my progress to date – it is a slow journey - and give some reasons as to why I didn't use one of the other three doorways.

I hope the discussion can open up to inputs from other people who have experiences to share of working full time in a company and turning Deming's thinking in to action.

BIOGRAPHY

Stuart is the Continuous Improvement Leader at Invotec, a Printed Circuit Board (PCB) manufacturer located in Tamworth, Staffordshire, England.

His first career was in the British Army where he served as a Troop Commander and then later as an Education Officer. He then joined Rolls-Royce Aerospace in Derby, England, initially involved in the design of training and then migrating into a number of roles in the Quality Improvement field. He has delivered Process Improvement training at a number of global sites including Indianapolis, Mount Vernon, Boston, Montreal, Singapore, Berlin and the Nordic countries.

He first took an interest in Quality when he read an obituary of Dr Deming in the Guardian newspaper in late December 1993 and thought he sounded an interesting person! This started a learning journey which continues to this day.

After leaving Rolls-Royce in 2008, he spent five years in consultancy work but then decided he wanted to work with a company on a full time basis to see if he could bring Deming's thinking in to action and get it embedded – rather than flitting in as a consultant and flitting out again, hoping that there would be some sustainability.

He reports slow progress, but remains optimistic.

CONTACT

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