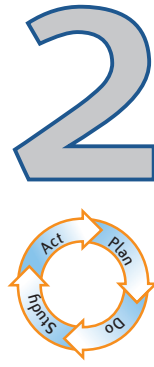


Silver Anniversary



Process Management International

1984-2009

Years of
Improvement

PMI is 25 years old this year. 1984 seems like yesterday to some of us, but it's a whole lifetime to others. How far have we come, is it easier or harder to improve our work after all this time?

Quality in 1984 was something you wished you could find, but felt you probably couldn't afford. We all accepted that our new car might break down, and had even lower expectations of domestic appliances. We didn't really know what a personal computer was of course. Banks, insurance companies, Government or Local Authorities could get away with delays and errors without much risk of complaint. The only things that seemed to be reliable were aircraft and Japanese cars. Everybody knew that aviation was an exceptional case and of course the Japanese were special somehow. Neither seemed to have much relevance to the rest of our lives.

Dr Deming (then aged 84) told his stories to those who would listen. Improve processes focussed on your customer, he said, and you will find that you get a better reputation and your costs will go down. Further, he claimed, the methods to do that effectively are based upon simple principles that apply everywhere and the Japanese have codified them so that we can all use them. He also emphasised that using them effectively demanded leadership, consistency and openness from top management. He didn't have too many examples of all those things happening, but where they did, great things resulted.

Thousands would come to hear Dr Deming give that message, in audiences of several hundred at a time, across the world. PMI was founded in 1984 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to provide practical guidance and training to those who wished to improve their own quality.

In 2009 things have moved forward. We now take for granted that our new car will be reliable. In fact, considering the much greater complexity of today's cars, they are astonishingly reliable. Many other products have benefited from the application of process improvement methods, even in aerospace, where the legendary levels of safety are now provided much more economically thanks to reliable processes that need much less rework and hence cost.

Many other fields have also benefited when the approach is led from the top, and persisted with over the years. We have probably all experienced a faster insurance claim, but you may not have appreciated the process management work behind a paper-less airline ticket, a faster treatment of a potential cancer, or the rapid delivery of your web purchase.

On the other hand, there have been, and indeed still are, all too many distorted applications and half-baked thinking. Arbitrary targets for waiting time, or crime reduction or customer satisfaction have all demonstrated lack of awareness at best, self delusion at worst, as traditional top managers have forced outdated thinking onto compartmentalised organisations.

The need for intelligent leadership has never been greater as we face environmental and economic challenges of an ever greater scale than in 1984. We at PMI have been proud to have worked with hundreds of clients and thousands of people, playing our part in helping them become systemic leaders. Through guiding and teaching from board level to the shop floor we have seen improvement emerge, sometimes beyond their wildest dreams.

25 years is a long time in business; we have seen fashions come and go but our key principles become more valid the more we test them. In 2009 we at PMI are best placed to make a difference for those leaders who appreciate the need to transform their own organisation's performance, and realise that it must start at the top. We have built a global business, still based upon Dr Deming's approach, but incorporating many refinements based upon our experiences and on the latest work about natural systems.

We are ready for the next 25 years, beyond labels such as Six Sigma or Lean. We will help our clients to understand their organisation as a system, and to lead its increasing self organisation so that everyone can play their part in responding to variety, reducing undesirable variation, and hence being able to reliably provide for the changing customers.

Jan Gillett Jane Seddon