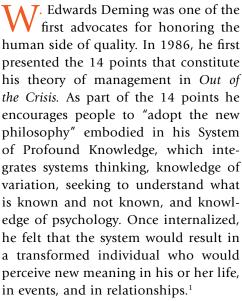The principles of the Burning Man Project may reframe our understanding of Deming's 14 points.

Burning Man

Quality and Innovation in the Spirit of Deming

Nicole M. Radziwill and Morgan C. Benton

W. Edwards Deming was one of the first advocates for honoring the human side of quality. In 1986, he first presented the 14 points that constitute his theory of management in *Out of the Crisis.* As part of the 14 points he encourages people to "adopt the new philosophy" embodied in his System of Profound Knowledge, which integrates systems thinking, knowledge of variation, seeking to understand what is known and not known, and knowledge of psychology. Once internalized, he felt that the system would result in a transformed individual who would perceive new meaning in his or her life, in events, and in relationships.[1]

The relevance of Deming's contributions has not diminished since they were introduced. According to a recent analysis of articles in the *Quality Management Journal*, this text has been the single most influential resource used by researchers who have published in that journal since it was launched in 1993.[2] The 14 points and System of Profound Knowledge have been critical influences in the development of total quality management (TQM) and the concept of quality culture in general.[3]

But all systems must eventually evolve and adapt to changes in the external environment, and quality is no exception. The 2011 ASQ Future of Quality Study, entitled "Emergence,"[4] emphasized eight key forces that are now shaping the future of quality. Included within the eight forces are global social responsibility, a shift in consumer awareness toward participative co-creation of value, the increasing rate of change, a workforce of the future that demands new models for learning, and the innovation of new systems for "adapting the way we live to create a sustainable future."[5] Each of these elements directly influences organizational culture, which has been a focal element in the management of quality since it emerged as a discipline in the mid-20th century.

In light of the volatility of the global economy since 2008, we are at a crossroads where it may be useful to re-examine the proven strength of these fundamental concepts in the context of the new forces shaping the future of quality. To do this, we explored the philosophy of Burning Man, which embodies at its core the values of social responsibility, co-creation of value, and new models for learning.

The Burning Man event is an annual gathering of approximately 50,000 people in the desert of northwestern Nevada, a harsh and austere environment nearly void of infrastructure. Its participants "create Black Rock City, dedicated to community, art, self-expression, and self-reliance, and depart one week later, having left no trace whatsoever."[6] In 2004, founder Larry Harvey captured the vision, mission, and values of the creative community behind the event in the 10 principles: radical inclusion, gifting, decommodification, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, leaving no trace, participation, and immediacy.[7] The events are marked by two rituals: the effigy burn that has come to symbolize the event, and the "temple" burn, a more somber occasion where participants can reflect on and symbolically release old attitudes, habits, and limiting beliefs that they write down and pin to the walls of that temple structure before it is incinerated.

The 10 principles are relevant to the quality profession because they embrace the essence of Deming's 14 points within the context and spirit of radical, socially responsible innovation. For example, researchers such as Fred Turner of Stanford have discovered that "by reframing technological work as a species of artistic creativity, by restating its goals as those of community building rather than profit seeking," a sense of social value can be restored, enhancing contributors' joy of work and pride in workmanship.[8] This underscores Deming's position that "the 14 points all have one aim: to make it possible for people to work with joy."[9]

This article introduces the quality community to the 10 principles and seeks to stimulate ideas on how to reframe our understanding of Deming's 14 points with respect to the forces shaping the future of quality. In doing so, we can improve our ability to design and realize intentional, sustainable, socially responsible communities and organizations that are *also* radically innovative.

Why Burning Man?

Now in its third decade, Burning Man has inspired regional events, international spin-offs, and collective demonstrations of community support. Burners have self-organized to provide hands-on support for rebuilding communities after hurricanes Katrina in 2005 and Sandy in 2012, with the express purpose of "creating collaborations and bringing as much fun to the project as possible."[9] A multitude of smaller gatherings are organized, also on an annual basis, around the world.

But why should we pay attention to the values and ethos of a "bohemian subculture" that includes anarchists, drifters, and mystics in its community alongside the artists, engineers, and academics? First and foremost, scholars have recently acknowledged that the culture and community that have emerged around Burning Man model the new forms of "hyper-socialized" production that characterize co-creation of value across organizational boundaries.[10] The events provide a microcosm for studying idea generation, team formation, emergent leadership, new product development, and the full product development cycle compressed into a short time span. Also, events and gatherings organized in the spirit of Burning Man have a history spanning almost 30 years, involving groups ranging in size from just a few participants to tens of thousands, providing a strong empirical basis for the effectiveness of the culture on many different scales. Sociologists and anthropologists are already engaged in research to explore how and why the culture is so inspirational and productive for so many of its participants.

Most significantly, what started as a subculture is slowly and steadily becoming more mainstream. Within high-tech professional communities in places like San Francisco and New York City, participation in Burning Man events is sometimes considered a "sanctioned form of professional development" and often appears on résumés much like conference attendance.[11]

By combining the social and professional elements of collaborative work and embracing diversity, these early adopters are demonstrating a new paradigm for innovation that lifts professional boundaries, relaxes creative potential, and unleashes greater creativity.[12] Because Burning Man "models the social structures on which manufacturing now depends, and at the same time provides a place in which to work through the psychological and material constraints that it imposes,"[13] the value system articulated by its 10 principles integrates personal transformation with collective contribution.

The 10 Principles

The 10 Principles of Burning Man act as an informal social contract for the participants in its events, providing a guide for how to relate to one another in the pursuit of shared goals. To deepen our understanding of the 10 principles, we examined them

through the lenses of well-known ethical schools of thought. After first ruling out deontology as a useful frame of reference,[14] we found that a utilitarian perspective allowed the 10 principles to be ranked and categorized according to their relative importance. Ultimately uncomfortable with a rigid ranking, however, we concluded that on a day-to-day basis the relative salience of the principles may shift slightly when taking into account the context of each situation in which an agent aspires to contribute to the common good. (It is also satisfying to note the way that the more traditional, "masculine" theory of utilitarianism is balanced and tempered by the more modern "feminist" ethic of care.) Our ranking and classification is briefly described below.

We stratified the 10 principles into two layers: the foundational principles, which act as antecedents (or conditions that give rise to) the effective demonstration of shared values in practice and the operational principles, which are expressed when community members gather together to produce art, artifacts, and experiences.

Foundational principles: Individual values that presuppose productive and engaged activities in support of creating shared experiences within the community.

- Civic responsibility: Public welfare is of utmost importance. Participants honor the sanctity of the social fabric and take personal responsibility for ensuring positive individual experiences that contribute to the greater good of the community, as well as society at large. Social responsibility, as individuals and a community, is highly valued.

- Immediacy: Rather than waiting to make contributions, each individual commits to being fully present in all activities, delivering value to create rich, shared experiences.

- Gifting: A cornerstone of this culture is the notion that each person identifies and gives gifts to other members of the community, as well as the collective, with no expectation of exchange or return. These gifts can be in the form of materials, labor, intellectual contributions, or emotional and moral support. A consequence of gifting is that everyone is encouraged to focus on the value they can provide to others, rather than what they can get from participation.

- Decommodification: To aggressively support the spirit of gifting, the community rejects the concept of commercial exchange and monetary transactions. This forces each person to relate to

others on the basis of what value they can deliver personally, which contributes to an atmosphere of trust and loyalty and the continued development of social capital.

- Participation: The text of the 10 principles states that "we believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation."[15] As a result, the notions of purpose, meaning, and individual contributions are unified through active engagement.

Operational principles: Practices that emerge in collective situations as a consequence of personally adopting and internalizing the foundational principles.

- Radical inclusion: Everyone is welcome to participate, given that they are committed to the values of social responsibility, contributing value without expectation of return, and engaged participation.

- Radical self-expression: Perhaps the most extreme of the 10 principles, the community values the unique contributions and participative styles of its members, so long as personal expression respects the "rights and liberties" of the others. As a defining factor for how members of the community relate to one another, this principle specifically aims to drive out fear, ensuring that all ideas and contributions are given the psychological space to be expressed and flourish.

- Communal effort: Cooperation, collaboration, and the protection of "the commons" are highly valued. Although individual gifts are honored, the community recognizes that its greatest achievements arise when people come together with shared values and purpose.

- Leave no trace: As a community, participants agree to leave the environment in a better state than they found it, with no trace of waste. This inspires continued attention to lean principles through personal contributions and communal activities.

- Radical self-reliance: At events, this principle means that participants must be prepared to attend to their needs, even as they are supported by the other members of the community. Participants take responsibility for their personal development, as well as identifying and developing the gifts and the value they will contribute.

Our interpretation of the intersection of Deming's 14 points and the 10 principles is

Table 1: Intersection of Deming's 14 Points and the 10 Principles of Burning Man

	Deming's 14 Points	Civic responsibility	Immediacy	Gifting	Decommodification	Participation	Radical inclusion	Radical self-expression	Communal effort	Leave no trace	Radical self-reliance
		Foundational					**Operational**				
1	Create constancy of purpose	X	X			X			X		
2	Adopt the new philosophy (System of Profound Knowledge)					X	X	X	X		X
3	Build quality into products and services (cease dependence on inspection)								X	X	
4	Cultivate supplier relationships based on loyalty and trust			X		X	X	X			
5	Improve constantly	X				X			X	X	
6	Institute training on the job	X				X	X		X		
7	Institute leadership to help people and machines do a better job	X				X			X		X
8	Drive out fear			X	X	X	X	X			X
9	Break down barriers				X	X	X		X		
10	Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets		X			X					
11	Eliminate quotas, management by objective, numerical goals		X			X					
12	Remove barriers that impede pride of workmanship and joy in work		X	X	X				X		
13	Institute vigorous education and self-improvement	X		X		X			X		X
14	Transformation is everyone's job		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	

presented in Table 1. For example, the principle of gifting helps to:

- Create supplier relationships based on loyalty and trust while driving out fear (because participants authentically give of themselves with no expectation of return).
- Remove the barriers that impede pride of workmanship and joy of work (because each gift is evidence of self-expression).
- Institute vigorous education and self-improvement (because everyone is continually seeking ways to contribute value in the form of gifts).
- Promote transformation as everyone's job (because gifting is an individual imperative with the specific aim of enhancing the experiences, capabilities, and products that everyone shares).

The mapping also provides insights regarding how we can integrate the 10 Principles of Burning Man into our organizations to catalyze radical innovation, following the spirit of Deming. For example, while instituting training on the job (one of Deming's 14 points), we can encourage a culture of innovation by pursuing this with civic responsibility, participation, radical inclusion, and communal effort in mind. Training on the job, as a result, should:

- Clearly communicate the civic duties of the trainee.
- Explain how each person can participate and contribute by adding value.
- Seek to integrate the unique and varied skills of all participants.
- Include group activities where communal effort is required to achieve goals.

Conclusions and Future Work

One of the key elements of the Burning Man culture expressed by the 10 principles is that it specifically eschews materialism and consumer culture. Although this may seem counter to the bottom-line focus of many quality improvement initiatives, it is important to recognize that the absence of emphasis on profit was one of the main reasons the Japanese

were so attracted to Deming and his approach. According to David Halberstam, "Deming's passion was for making better products, or more accurately, for creating a system that could make better products. It was not for making money. He clearly had little interest in material things. He was the kind of American the Japanese had always heard about, a spiritual man, not a materialistic one."[16]

Perhaps by turning back toward a spiritual orientation to quality and participation we can recapture some of the original motivations of Deming's philosophy to inspire individual transformation as a means of catalyzing collective innovation—an inherently social activity. This perspective has the potential to transform not only individuals, but also institutions in the seamless pursuit of quality and innovation. We personally believe that the 10 principles provide an excellent basis for transforming the institution of higher education, and have launched the Burning Mind Project[17] to explore such potential.

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Nicole M. Radziwill

Nicole M. Radziwill is an assistant professor in the Department of Integrated Science and Technology at James Madison University (JMU) in Harrisonburg, VA. She is an ASQ Fellow and, as one of ASQ's Influential Voices, she blogs at **http://qualityandinnovation.com.** *Prior to JMU, she was an assistant director at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory where she was responsible for software quality. She is co-founder of the Burning Mind Project at* **http://burningmindproject.org** *and can be contacted at* **nicole@burningmindproject.org.**

Morgan C. Benton

Morgan C. Benton is an associate professor in the Department of Integrated Science and Technology at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA. He applies the latest research in learning and motivation to building Web-based learning management systems that increase efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Benton is co-founder of the Burning Mind Project at **http://burningmindproject.org** *and can be contacted at* **morgan@burningmindproject.org.**