

People working together can make a more perfect union

Your Turn

Tim J. Clark
Guest columnist

Addressing the spiritual, economic and social challenges of our times may be as simple as recognizing that, although we may share a common desire for improvement, we have different ideas on the changes that need to be made to bring about that improvement.

But how do you determine when a change results in an improvement?

Faith-inspired philosophies, such as Christianity, can help answer this question. These philosophies acknowledge that human beings will always be imperfect but can improve by leveraging the potential of the human spirit. Changes motivated by love, compassion and the application of better methods can result in outcomes where everyone can benefit or at least not be any worse off in the long-term.

Philosophies that also align with the aim of the U.S. Constitution can provide



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a frame of reference for determining when a change results in an improvement. The aim of the American system of government is to enable “We the People” to work together to make progress – not toward a “perfect” union, which would be impossible – but rather toward a “more perfect” union.

The Founding Fathers of the United States provided us with the Bill of Rights, so that we may work toward a more perfect or better union. What the founders left up to future generations was to develop and apply better methods for determining when a change results in an improvement.

Walter Shewhart discovered one of those methods – the variation principle – in 1924. This principle is rooted in the fact that actions are accomplished through a process and everything involved in a process or system varies, including people.

The type of variation (common cause or special cause) in a process or system helps identify the type of action needed to improve it. Continuous improvement by reducing variation results in better quality and less imperfection.

W. Edwards Deming, a student and colleague of Shewhart, developed methods that support the application of Shewhart’s variation principle to improve the quality of products and services. Deming’s contributions were recognized by Fortune magazine as being among the 20 that have shaped the modern world of business and by U.S. News and World Report as one of nine turning points in history.

The top turning point was identified as “The Apostle Paul, whose preaching and eloquent writings led to mass acceptance of Christianity.”

Deming once said that if he was to reduce his message to just a few words, it all had to do with individuals working together to make things more perfect by reducing variation.

I had the opportunity to attend a

four-day seminar conducted by Deming in the late 1980s. Since then, I’ve successfully applied his methods to many areas of my life, including personal, family, community and career. For example, I had the opportunity to apply them while supporting the development of military and national defense-related strategies.

In 1986, Deming, estimated that it would take another 50 years before awareness of Shewhart’s contributions were more commonly known.

I hope that in some small way I have at least raised awareness of a new method that can be applied to leverage the potential of the human spirit that supports progress toward a more perfect community and union.

Tim J. Clark is a senior member of the American Society for Quality, past chairman of the Indianapolis Section and an exponent of an improved standard for quality leadership that supplements faith-based philosophies with the scientific method.