On Baseball, Bowling Balls, and Teamwork

As with many success stories, the American pastime of baseball has many fathers (and mothers), with a heritage that extends well beyond the original thirteen colonies to England. Consider the design of the playing field, with “foul” lines emanating from “home plate,” to the left, past third base, all the way to the outfield fence, and to the right, past first base, to the right field fence. Nine defensive players are distributed around this diamond and across the outfield. None of their jobs are defined by outlines that restrict their roles in the way that a goalkeeper in soccer can use his or her hands only within the confines of the penalty area. What if, in contrast, baseball players were each constrained in their field positions by solid boundaries, painted on the field? Might this situation begin to approximate the operation of an organization with inflexible job descriptions, wherein employees are left to believe their respective roles are independent?

Such rigidity is a classic attribute of what Dr. Deming termed “the prevailing style of management,” with each co-worker seeking to conform to a pre-defined set of requirements for their role, presumably independent of the performance of others within the organization. In the absence of interdependence, the concept of a team sport might instead be known as a group sport, with a common aim superseded by individual aims. Beginning with an exploration of baseball and bowling balls, this aim of this presentation is to share a proposal for “better thinking about thinking” as it applies to teamwork in all aspects of our lives.

Day: April 11, 2014
Time: 3:15 pm – 4:15 pm
Room: EB 102