



Defining Quality:

The standard of “quality”
in theological education

Dr. Brian A de Vries, 11 June 2019



Defining *Quality* in Theological Education

1. The difficulty of unbiased definition
2. Towards an evangelical description
3. Motivations for promoting quality





- **What Do We Mean by a Quality Education?**

Contributor: Sean Slade

- “Last September, the **United Nations** (UN) ratified 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) to serve as benchmarks for every nation to ensure global prosperity, protection of the planet, and an eradication of poverty...”



- **Goal 4—Quality Education:**
Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning

Quality... a priority outcome



- United Nations, SDG #4 – quality education
- A priority outcome of South Africa's NDP2030
- The mandate of the **Higher Education Quality Committee** (HEQC) of the **Council of Higher Education** (CHE) in South Africa.
- **Google:** “Quality education is **a human right and a public good**. Governments and other public authorities should ensure that a quality education service is available freely to all citizens from early childhood into adulthood. Quality education **provides the foundation for equity in society.**”

Quality... by whose definition?



Ethiopian M. N. Kahsay (2012:29) quotes prominent higher education experts:

- “**notoriously elusive**” (Gibson, 1986; Neave, 1986; Scott, 1994)
- “**slippery**” (Pfeffer and Coot, 1991)
- “**relative**” (Baird, 1998; Harvey and Green, 1993; Middlehurst, 1992; Vroeijenstijn, 1992; Westerheijden, 1990)
- “**dynamic**” (Boyle and Bowden, 1997)
- “**multidimensional**” (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002)
- “**a philosophical concept that lacks a general theory in the literature**” (Green, 1994; Westerheijden, 1999).

Kahsay, M. N. (2012). *Quality and Quality Assurance in Ethiopian Higher Education: Critical Issues and Practical Implications*. PhD Dissertation. University of Twente, Netherlands.

Quality... an elusive definition ⁽¹⁾



“Quality assurance has avoided any real examination of the intrinsic nature of quality as related to higher education.”

Lee Harvey, “Twenty years of trying to make sense of quality assurance” (2010:8).

Quality... an elusive definition (2)



“It [is not] hard to get a consensus around the proposition that universities should aim for high quality... But it is much harder to identify what quality actually is, how it can be recognised and how it can be measured.

...key policy documents on quality assurance for universities go into great detail about the process by which quality should be assured without ever once saying what actually constitutes ‘quality.’”

Ferdinand von Prondzynski (18 Oct 2011),

Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Robert Gordon University of Aberdeen in Scotland

Divergence in defining quality



- The starting point for promoting *quality* ...must be found by first identifying... the assumptions used to define *quality*.
- How can we walk this road together unless we agree –
 - Agree... not only on the importance of promoting quality,
 - But first and especially...
on the basic assumptions used to define quality?



Review of related literature (1)



Lee Harvey and Diana Green (1993)

- Proposed five ways of thinking about quality
- Based on a review of various attempts at defining quality in higher education

1. Quality as exceptional / excellence
2. Quality as perfection
3. Quality as fitness for purpose
4. Quality as value for money
5. Quality as transformation

What is Quality
in Higher
Education?

Edited by
Diana Green

Society for Research into Higher Education
& Open University Press

Harvey & Green (1993)

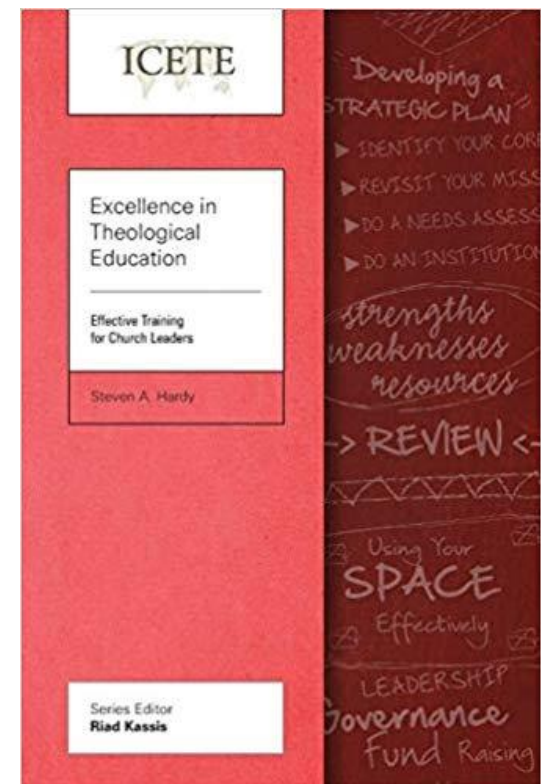


Review of related literature (2)



Steven A. Hardy, *Excellence in Theological Education: Effective Training for Church Leaders*, SIM, 2006 (Langham, 2016).

- Defines the concept of excellence as it relates to various areas of theological education institutions
 - Leadership
 - Governance
 - Curriculum
 - Facilities
 - Fundraising
 - Extended Training, etc.
 - Planning
 - Administration
 - Teachers
 - Libraries
 - Evaluation

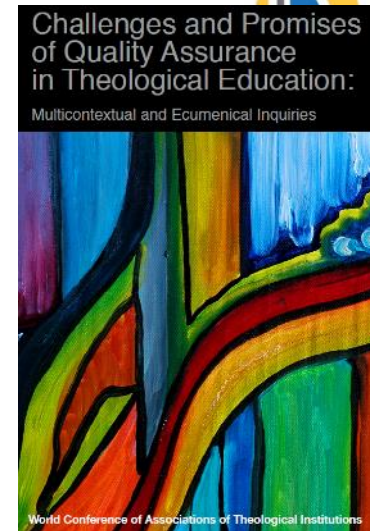


Review of related literature (3)



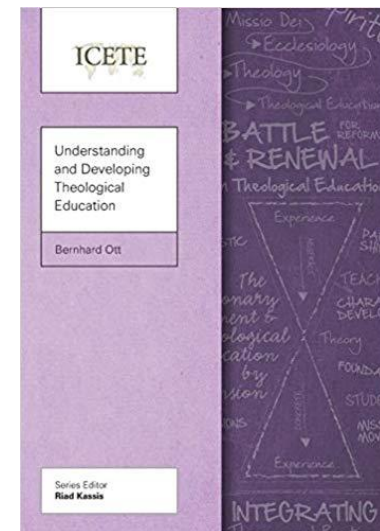
- *Challenges and Promises of Quality Assurance in Theological Education: Multicontextual and Ecumenical Inquiries* (2013)

- World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI)
- Papers presented on 4-6 July 2011 in Johannesburg, South Africa



- Bernhard Ott, *Understanding and Developing Theological Education* (2016)

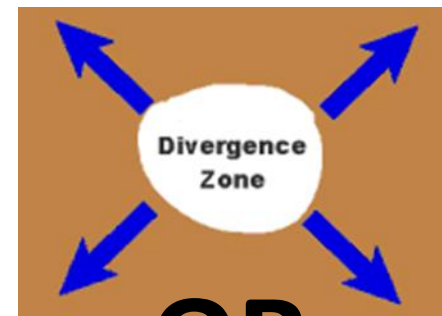
- Especially chapter 7 on “Ensuring Quality in Theological Education”
- “Quality management is about much more than judging a school’s quality on the basis of a single ‘still photograph.’ It is more about a process...”



Convergence in defining quality



- The starting point in promoting *quality* ...must be located in agreement... around the assumptions used to define *quality*
- *Quality* is a concept that broadly encompasses:
 - the educator's character and ability,
 - the institutional values,
 - the learning environment and process,
 - the lesson contents,
 - the learner's experiences,
 - the educational outcomes, etc.



OR

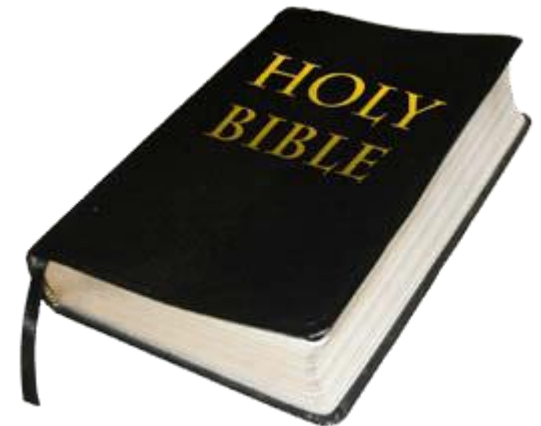


Motives for promoting quality



Concepts related to *quality* in the Bible:

1. Quality as **Excellence** (or excelling)
2. Quality as **Goodness** (or perfection)
3. Quality as **Fitness** [for service]
4. Quality as **Wholeness & Maturity**



Quality as Excellence



2 Corinthians 8:7 – “But as you **excel** in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you - see that you **excel** in this act of grace also.”

2 Corinthians 9:8 – “And God is able to make all grace **abound** to you, so that having all contentment in all things at all times, you may **abound** in every good work.”

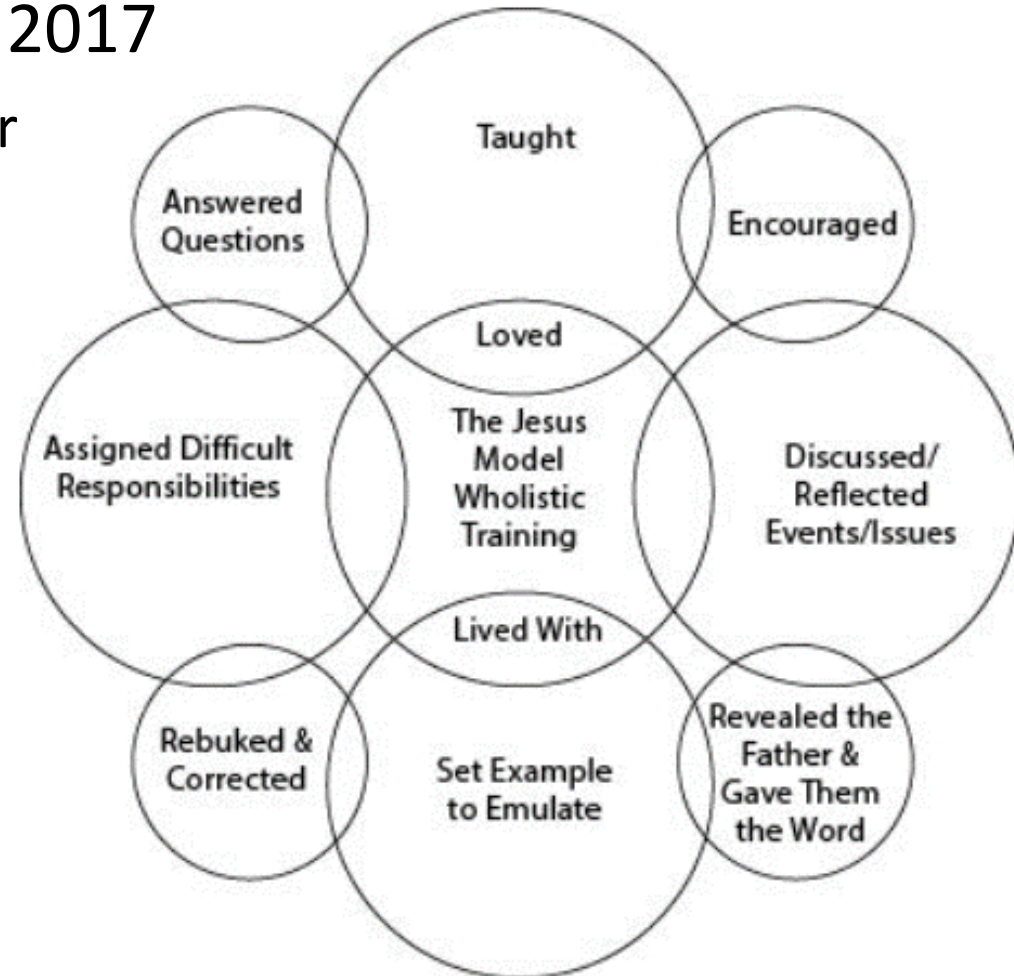
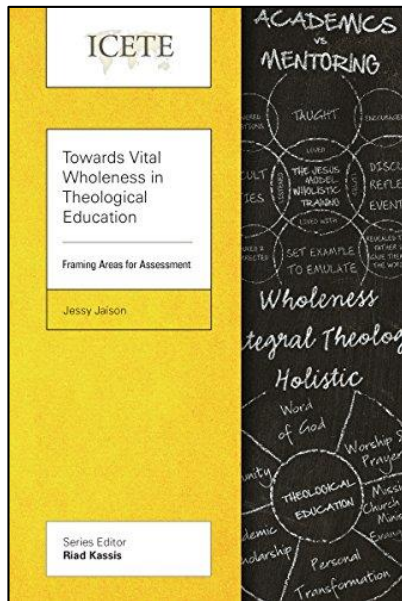
Philippians 1:9-10 – “And it is my prayer that your love may **abound** more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is **excellent**, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ...”

1 Thessalonians 3:12 – “and may the Lord make you increase and **abound** [excel] in love for one another and for all, as we do for you...”

Jaison, Wholeness in Education



- Jessy Jaison, *Towards Vital Wholeness in Theological Education: Framing Areas for Assessment* (ICETE)
Langham Global Library, 2017
 - Jesus, the perfect Teacher
 - The JESUS Model of Wholistic training



Biblical concepts of quality



- **Excellence**

- 2 Corinthians 9:8 – “And God is able to make all grace [**excel**] to you, so that having all contentment in all things at all times, you may [**excel**] in every good work.

- **Goodness**

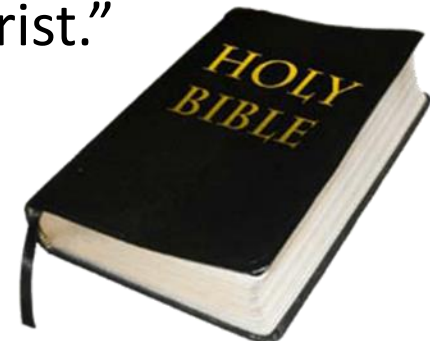
- Genesis 1:31 – “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was **very good**.”

- **Fitness**

- 2 Peter 1:8 – “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they **keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful** in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- **Wholeness**

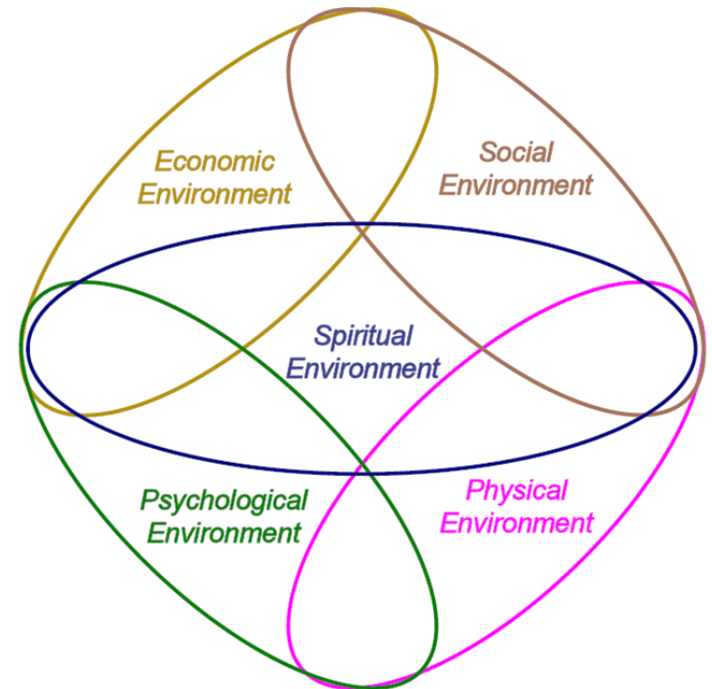
- Matthew 5:48 – “You therefore must be **perfect**, as your heavenly Father is **perfect**.”



Components of quality



- The goal(s) for quality
- The motive(s) for quality
- Practical aspects
- Pragmatic aspects



Components: practical



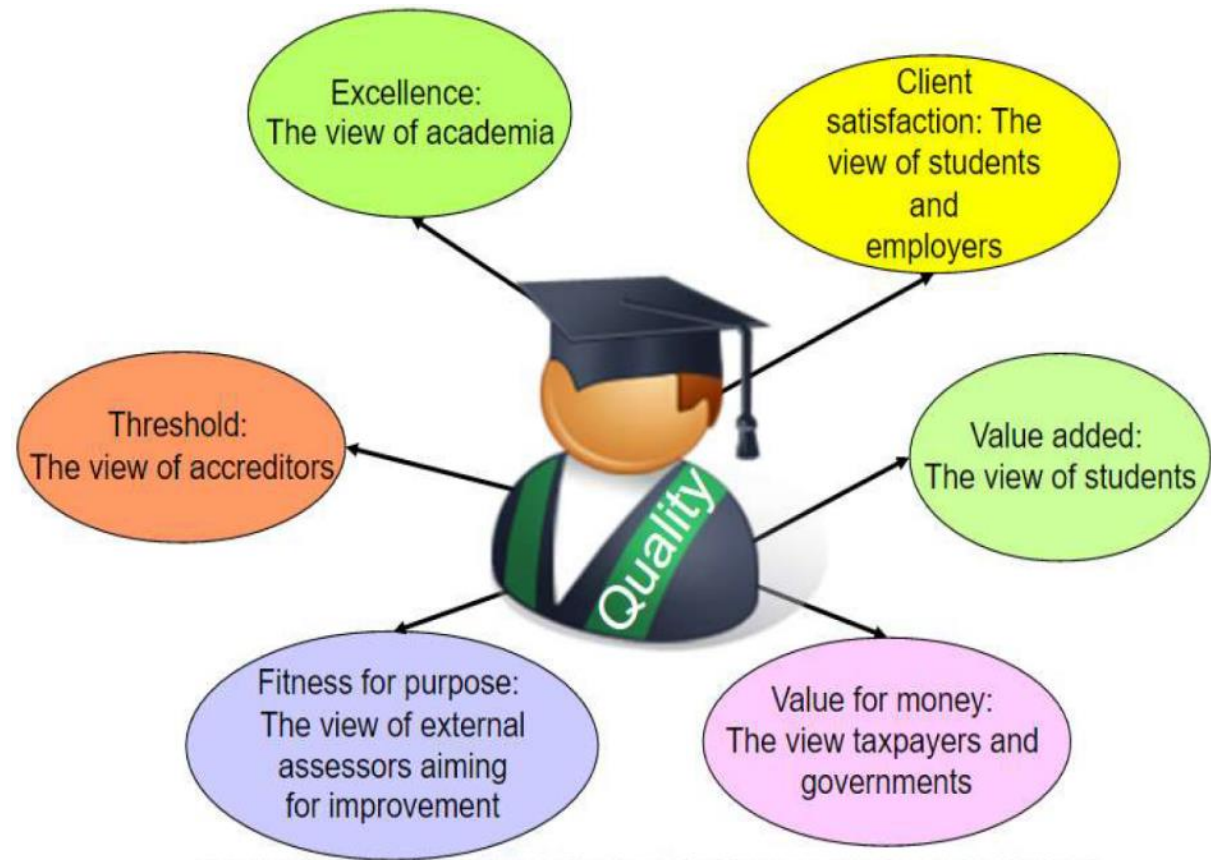
“If a student should learn a thousand things, and yet fail to preach the gospel acceptably, his College course will have missed its true design. Should the pursuit of literary prizes and the ambition for classical honors so occupy his mind as to divert his attention from his life work, they are perilous rather than beneficial.”

C. H. Spurgeon, *Lecturers to My Students*

Components: pragmatic



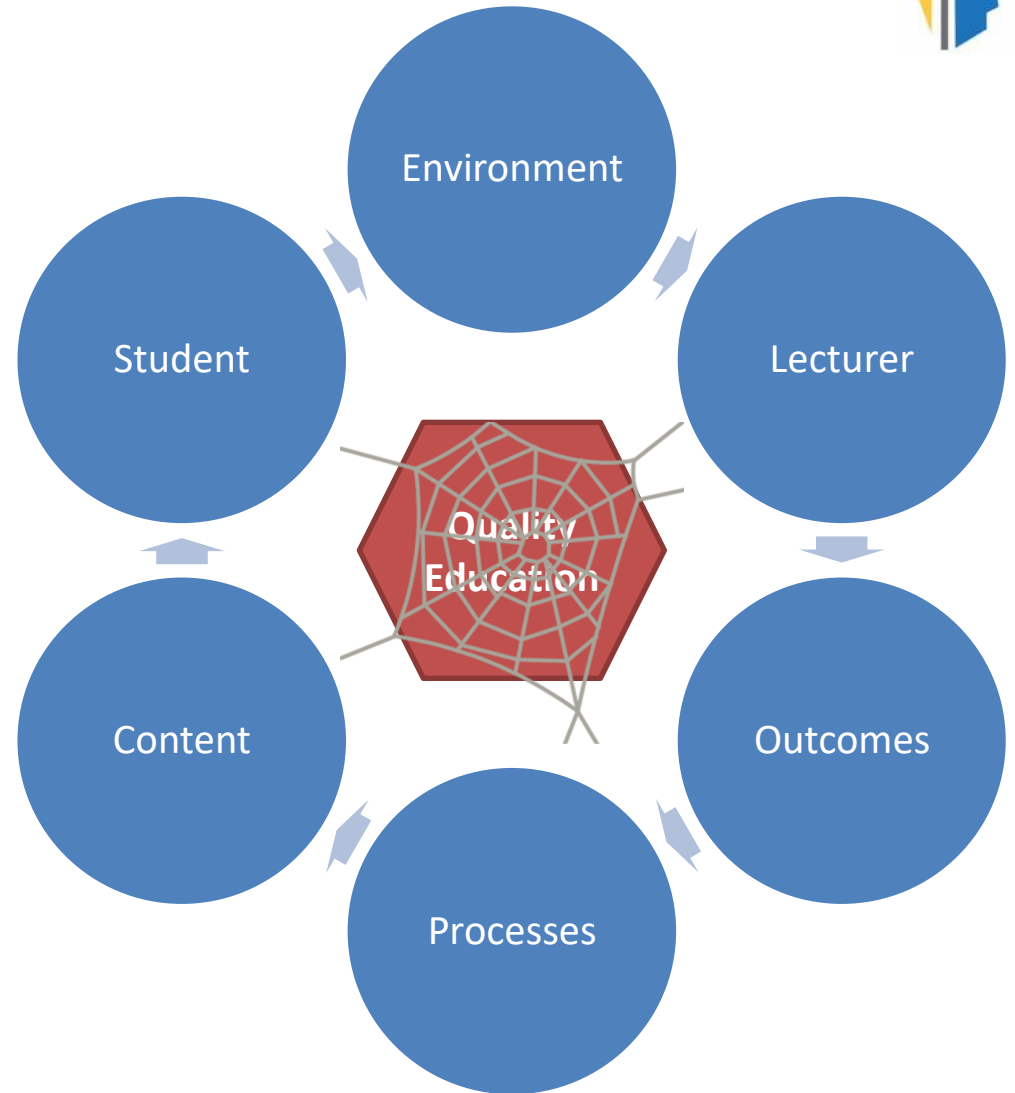
- Pragmatic aspects of seeking quality:



Spheres of quality



- Environment
- Lecturers
- Content
- Processes
- Outcomes
- Students



Standards for quality

- What are your criteria?
 - External (and conflicting?) values...
 - Measuring ourselves by ourselves (echo chamber)...
- Which standard(s) should we use?
 - The Bible, church(es), regional?
 - National and/or international?
- A minimum standard or a higher calling & goal?



Motives for promoting quality



- Several **BIBLICAL** motives (repeated)

Excellence

Goodness

Fitness

Wholeness

- Several **PRAGMATIC** motives

Effective

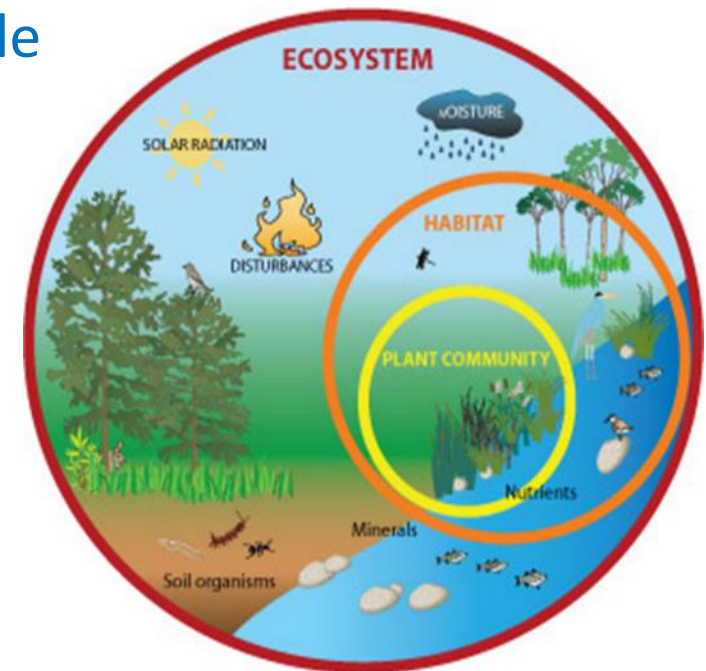
Efficient

Shrewd

Profitable

- An **EVANGELISTIC** motive

- An **ESCHATOLOGICAL** vision that incites hopes



Biblical concepts of quality



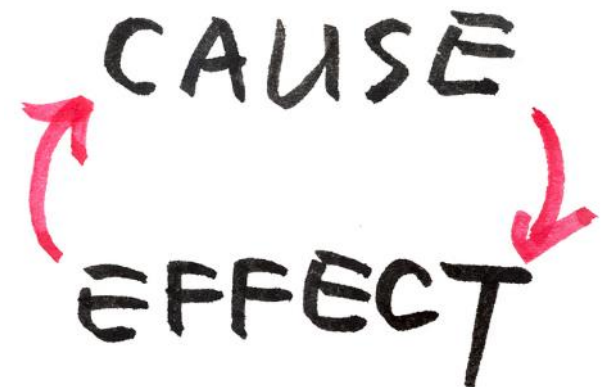
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Motives for promoting quality



Pragmatic motives to seek quality:

- Effective
- Efficient
- Shrewd
- Profitable





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