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THE 5 P'S OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A friendly Tweet referred me to a super social media training video produced by the Department of Justice for the state of Victoria, Australia. [The Justice, Victoria video](#) communicates the department's policy about the use of social media in the workplace. The video begins by identifying major social media sites as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Yammer, but then goes on to show that social media encompasses a multitude of websites and really can be any place where a person publicly shares information with others, whether by comments or files or whatever.

An organizational development group at LinkedIn found this post the other day: *What is Organizational Development?* The poster lamented that clients and prospects often ask that question and she just as often fumbles for a simple answer. The group responded with a variety of takes on OD. OD aligns people and skills to a strategic vision or goal of the company. OD is the intelligent management of human capital through training and corporate communication. OD is change management, foundational learning and continuing education, technology and tools implementation, needs assessments, and finding and shaping leaders. Although all those responses are true, they are not visual, and it's the visual examples that make the best point, that make a lasting impression. The Justice, Victoria video is an example of OD to improve workplace productivity, legal compliance, and employee knowledge around the issue of social media in the workplace; and if someone asked what's OD I could easily say it's Justice, Victoria identifying the need to control the use of social media by its employees and producing a catchy 5 minute video to present its policy about social media in the workplace.

During my grad program in organizational communication and development, people asked me to explain OD all the time, even people who made their living in training and education and management. In conversation I don't like to speak in jargon or technicalities, so I usually explained it as fine-tuning the company to accomplish its goals... through recruiting, training, communication, analysis and adjustment. In short, another aspect of management with a special interest in your people and systems. Because I'm attuned to the ideas of OD, I see it in practice all the time, even in places where the term OD or its concept is foreign. I taught High School for a short time and remember a head football coach who wanted to turnaround an unsuccessful football program. His plan included attracting more kids to try-out for the team, getting the kids in better shape with supervised weight training and running, and getting them to study football through books, videos, and camps. More than all that, he wanted to learn about prospects in the middle schools that fed students to his high school and get those kids prepped for the future before they even graduated. When I heard about all the coach was doing, I told the other coaches in the room "you see, that's organizational development."

So there's a bit of a disconnect between doing OD and explaining what it means. Examples and war stories demonstrate things best, but explaining OD in terms and points is often our inclination. In this piece I'll synthesize examples and terms in a way that makes OD easy to remember without ignoring the depth of its foundation.

There is something about P words that is memorable. There are the 4 P's of marketing: Product, Placement, Price, and Promotion. The recording industry gave birth to superstars P-Funk and P. Diddy. Pianist Bill Evans penned the jazz standard Peace Piece. In my work on interpersonal communication in the workplace, I identified 3 P's that were barriers to that communication: Power, Place, and Preservation. Now I'm going to propose 5 P's to summarize OD. The 5 P's of OD relate to the constant *P* of People, and lead to the desirable *P* of Profit. The 5 P's are:

- Pick
- Prepare
- Process
- Point
- Powerize

Pro sports in the US provide many visible examples of the importance of picking the right people. National Football League teams scout college football players during the college season, NFL teams host college players for workouts and interviews before the official player draft in late April, and the NFL hosts a college player combine where a few hundred draft eligible players come together for standardized testing of athleticism, skills, and psychology. There is a cottage industry of service companies who compile information and analysis about college players that is sold to teams to supplement their own data. The NFL teams do all this because they need to find the best talent available for positions they need to fill, they need to find people who can assimilate into the teams culture and coaching philosophy. The teams also prefer to find people who are dependable, coachable, intelligent, and likely to represent the team and the league in good stead.

The effort to pick people for an NFL team is extraordinary, largely because the contract of a player drafted into the NFL is more valuable than other college grads, but elements of the NFL approach can be seen in other business and professional settings. Scouting and recruiting college talent helped Pixar convince some of the top PhD candidates at MIT to abandon their research and join the computer animation revolution. Small firms and giant corporations use personality and intelligence tests, as those offered by UK based SHL Group, to screen prospective employees for knowledge, attitude, and overall suitability. In the book [Change Or Die](#), author Alan Deutschman tells a story about the early days at Amazon.com when founder Jeff Bezos established a culture and hired people who "were frugal and resourceful and loved to analyze information and try new things and take big risks." In the beginning Amazon would compile a bulging file of information about every job applicant, and Bezos would personally interview each one. "I'd rather interview 50 people and not hire one than hire the wrong person," said Bezos.

Preparing the people you've picked for the work you need done is where training and communication become OD. The traditional view of training is narrow perhaps. People have to learn the company systems and software, they need to understand benefits and HR procedures, and they need to learn broad company policies about harassment and ethics. The video by Justice Victoria that I introduced at the start of this piece is traditional training in a contemporary wrapper. But training today goes beyond a new look and feel, or new technologies. It includes communication of all the skills, knowledge, commitments, and beliefs of an organization. Non-traditional skills as mentoring, interpersonal communication, problem solving. Knowledge of an organization's history, its bygone leaders and transformational moments. Beliefs that give birth to the work it does, the workplace it promotes, and the customers it serves.

An employee at the Sierra Club would not be complete if he didn't know how it began with John Muir, how it grew into an agent of political action under David Brower, and how it became a gentler force for conservation after Brower left to start Friends of the Earth. New employee orientation at other conservation organizations can include field trips to preserves and project sites. A commitment to diversity in the wild invariably leads to a commitment to diversity in the company, and at the World Wildlife Fund they promote respect among the multicultural groups of employees, supporters, and partners who are joined in the organization's mission. All these kinds of training are educational, experiential, and philosophical in substance, but they are not just fun for fun's sake. They are designed to develop an organization whose people are attached to its work and to each other in ways that make them more effective and content.

Process greatly affects the life of an organization and its people and must be accounted for in a summary of OD. Process relates to how an organization and its people accomplish their work and remain a going concern. Process can be the layout of a manufacturing floor so that work and communication flows from one area to another without a lot of wasted steps or barriers. Process can be the kind of information a department gathers and stores so that time and effort spent is meaningful. Process can be moving from paper to digital records and choosing to buy supplies locally. It can be smoother sales transactions, or improving cash flow with a different kind of financing arrangement. Process is often learning to identify and live with change inside and outside the organization. Process is satisfying customers better and worrying less about how "we've always done things around here."

The late Ray Anderson was the founder and longtime leader of Interface, a carpet and floor covering company headquartered in Atlanta, GA. Inspired in 1994 by the idea of a sustainable and earth-friendly company and product line, Anderson set his company upon a course to reduce its ecological impact on the planet and neighbors around the world. Anderson recognized his company as a system that perpetuated a "take, make, waste" approach to manufacturing, and he directed his people to use every effort to lead the company away from that system. Anderson referred to himself as a "recovering plunderer." The changes at Interface meant less water usage, less garbage in landfills, and more use of renewable energy. Impressively, the changes increased profit and led to the best products Interface has ever made. Interface proves that conventional ideas about manufacturing, cost and profitability are not immutable, and that it's possible to manufacture a resource heavy product with zero impact upon Earth. Importantly, Anderson found that his zero impact mission "galvanized" his people to work better from top to bottom.

I spent the whole decade of the 1990s at a company called Heller Financial. Heller had been in commercial lending for half a century and done some innovative things as car loans for Model Ts and financing the Gary Cooper classic movie High Noon. But by 1983 Heller, then known as Walter E. Heller International, had begun to decline in the marketplace and needed to change. The old company was bought by a large Japanese bank who added capital and a new executive team pulled from leading companies as General Electric. The transformation of Heller was multidimensional. Heller invested in and expanded the things it did well, and shed the operations that were limping along or fading. Heller found better young talent by recruiting from the top colleges near its locations. Once known as "the lender of last resort," Heller began to improve the credit quality of its portfolio so it could reduce credit loss and increase profitability in various ways. At the end of these and other endeavors, Heller had been through a very successful IPO in 1998 and acquired by GE Capital in 2001 for \$5.3 Billion, more than 12 times the price paid in 1983.

I tell the short story of Heller because inside the company during those years was a model of how to develop an organization using internal communication, or what I call pointing your people in the right direction. Particularly in the years leading up to Heller's IPO, everyone knew the big strategy for Heller: improve credit quality, decrease loss reserves, reduce the rate of interest it had to pay to borrow funds in the commercial paper market, be smart. All those things would mean better results, and all those things could be affected by the effort of each employee. Everyone knew the big strategy because the executive leaders made it well known in person, in writing, and in action. Employees were continuously shown the operational measures that mattered, where the company stood and where it needed to be. It was hard to find anyone awake at Heller then who didn't know the plan because it was no secret, it was the beacon that steered the day to day work of the entire organization.

The movement to Empower employees began a couple of decades ago and has proved to be profitable for a variety of companies from the GORE-TEX people at W.L. Gore to Toyota Motor Corporation. Empowering is the last P in the 5 P's of OD because it's a perilous step to take unless an organization has done a good job with the first 4 P's. There's downside risk to empowering people who haven't been picked, prepared, processed, and pointed well, but there's downside risk to operating a bureaucratic and functionary operation with people who have been 4 P'd well. Studies show that the best people, those who have opportunities beyond their current employment, will turnover much faster in a place that keeps them under the big thumb of bureaucratic paralysis. So failing to empower those who are 4 P'd well is double trouble: you decrease their productivity on the job and lose them completely when they become dissatisfied and leave. But aside from all the plus and minus variable calculations possible above, good OD seeks to unleash employee productivity by giving individuals and small groups the power to act upon their good judgment and experience.

In youth football leagues there are very few offensive plays to call. In high school there are more offensive plays in the playbook, but coaches call all the plays. In college there are still more plays in the playbook, and the coaches still script and call most plays, but the quarterback can call audibles or modify the play based on his assessment of the defense. In the NFL there are stacks of plays and formations, there are scripted plays and audibles, but there are also superstar players as Peyton Manning and Tom Brady who can call the plays themselves based on the weekly game plan developed by the coaches and in response to the other team's real-time choice of defensive formations. Obviously, the highest level of football play is found in the NFL, and the most successful quarterbacks in the pro game today are Brady, Manning, and their like, so the case is strong that the highest level of performance comes from a team well picked, prepared, processed, pointed, and powerized to win.

The 5 P's, those are organizational development.
What is organizational development? The 5 P's.

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