

Kluwer Mediation Blog

Give Ps a chance!

Charlie Woods (Core Solutions Group / Scottish Universities Insight Institute) · Thursday, December 8th, 2022

At a recent Global Ethical Finance Initiative [event](#) Katherine Trebeck of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance discussed her [book](#) 'The Economics of Arrival'. The book explores the contribution of economic growth to wellbeing, particularly in the context of developed economies who could be considered to have 'arrived'. It makes the argument that beyond a certain threshold, where diminishing marginal returns begin to apply, 'better' might be a more appropriate economic focus than 'bigger'.

She summarised some of the main messages with reference to 4Ps:

- *Purpose* – be clear about why you are doing something. This applies to individuals (something that John Sturrock reflects on in the opening chapter of his recent [book](#)), companies and society as a whole. A purposeful approach often has side benefits as well. For example, companies that are focussed on a core purpose rather than their bottom line or shareholder returns tend to perform better than those that focus on financial metrics alone. This was graphically illustrated by John Kay in reflecting on the history of ICI in his book *Obliquity* (some of the main themes are summarised [here](#)).
- *Prevention* – try to reduce 'failure demand' generated by creating social and environmental problems and then having to clear them up and ameliorate their consequences. This may well involve some system redesign and investment in activities that will prevent expensive problems occurring in future, good examples would be early years development or non-carbon energy sources. This was a key message of the Christie Commission [report](#) on the future delivery of public services in Scotland.
- *Pre-distribution* – aim for an equitable division of resources and returns up front rather than having to re-distribute after the event with the associated stigma, resentment and sense of loss involved. Community Wealth Building is one [approach](#) (involving amongst other things progressive procurement of services by public authorities and plural ownership of assets), which aims to ensure a fairer distribution of assets and income – it also ties in closely to the fourth P as well.
- *People power* – give people greater agency to influence the things that impact on their lives. Not only will this improve outcomes it is also likely to have a positive impact on wellbeing in its own right. Examples might include greater employee ownership and decision making, citizens assemblies and participatory budgeting.

Trebeck concludes that an economy focussed on these Ps is more likely to be one that serves

people and the planet rather than exploiting them.

The use of Ps in this way put me in mind of some of the important skills, attributes and approaches a mediator will deploy:

- *Preparation* – as the well-known adage puts it ‘Proper Planning and Preparation Prevents Poor Performance’ (there is another P that can be added to this!).
- *Patience, Persistence, Perseverance and Perspiration* – required in almost all mediations as the going gets tough and parties lose heart.
- *Precision* – vital, particularly where permission is being sought to exchange information or offers.
- *Performance* – the mediator is in many respects a performer and the parties expect something from them, while not as formal as a court room setting some elements of ritual can sometimes be helpful to the process.
- *Passion* – often required not least to help maintain energy amongst all the players, this is helped by trying to engender a positive, forward looking outlook.
- *Pausing* – allowing space for thought and reflection, which can often elicit important insights.

Although a mediator is in many respects powerless, particularly as far as content is concerned, they are at the same time the facilitator of an extremely powerful process that helps parties to come down from their well defended positions to explore the plain of possibilities.

I have to admit I have not been entirely original in my choice of title. In preparing this blog I discovered it had also been used in a [paper](#) describing an approach by the MIT Media Lab to help young people develop their creative skills. They summarise the key elements of this approach and associated insights as follows:

- *Projects* – people learn best when they are actively working on meaningful projects – generating new ideas, designing prototypes, refining iteratively.
- *Peers* – learning flourishes as a social activity, with people sharing ideas, collaborating on projects, and building on one another’s work.
- *Passion* – when people work on projects they care about, they work longer and harder, persist in the face of challenges, and learn more in the process.
- *Play* – learning involves playful experimentation – trying new things, tinkering with materials, testing boundaries, taking risks, iterating again and again.

These lessons would appear to be applicable in many contexts.

Whatever perspective you come at things from and whatever the subject it certainly looks like there may be a lot of milage in giving Ps a chance!


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The graphic features a black background with white text and a circular icon. The icon depicts a group of five stylized human figures, with a magnifying glass positioned over the central figure. The background is accented with horizontal lines in blue and green, and the Wolters Kluwer logo is located in the bottom left corner.

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