



## From Dumb to Dope: The Evolution and Adaptation of the “D” Framework in Safety

In the world of risk management, heuristics and acronyms serve a critical role in making complex ideas understandable and actionable at the front line. Originating in the U.S. Air Force and now in use across industries, the “D” framework has emerged as a powerful - and increasingly adaptable - tool for surfacing risk, prompting learning, and fostering dialogue. This article traces the evolution of the framework from its humble beginnings to its modern, modular form.

### Origins: The Three Ds

An early example of the “D” model’s use in risk management comes from the U.S. Air Force, 33rd Fighter Wing, aka the “Nomads”.



The Nomads articulated the D framework as “*Dumb, dangerous, different: 3Ds can keep you safe*”, and defined it as:

- **Dumb:** Actions that are inherently ill-advised or lacking in judgment.
- **Dangerous:** Activities or situations that pose significant risk.

- **Different:** Scenarios that deviate from the norm or routine.

Given that the Nomads described the 3Ds as being passed down as “tribal knowledge” it appears they were in circulation within the USAF by the mid-2000s or earlier.

### Custom Ds: Expansion, Positivity & Contextual Adaptation

As concepts like Human and Organizational Performance (HOP) and Safety Differently gained ground, other safety thinkers began expanding the model in the mid to late 2010s. In particular, practitioners popularized a “Four D” framework that added one more layer:

- **Difficult:** This expansion acknowledged that complexity and challenge can also signal risk or system stress. The 4Ds became a conversation tool, not only for workplace learning teams but also for proactive field engagement, allowing workers and leaders to reflect together on work conditions.

In a more recent development, vPSI Group introduced a fifth D, a positive term:

- **Dope:** By including “Dope,” meaning desirable, successful, or working well, vPSI explicitly introduced appreciative inquiry into the framework. This addition encourages organizations to also learn from what’s going right, not just what’s going wrong - a clear nod to Safety II and resilience thinking.

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Thus, the full vPSI “Five Ds” became:

- **Dumb**
- **Dangerous**
- **Different**
- **Difficult**
- **Dope**

The addition of a positive term helps balance the emotional tone of safety conversations, reinforcing psychological safety and learning from success and excellence.

The true strength of the D framework lies in its modularity. Different organizations have added Ds to suit their environments.

Examples include:

**Dirty:** For messy, unhygienic, or contamination-prone tasks

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### **IOGP 365 Land Transportation Safety: The Value and Challenges of Adopting Industry Good Practice**

One of the ongoing, high-risk, activities within Oil and Gas is land transportation safety. Each year we lose too many people to the simple act of driving for our work, and yet there are solutions that can help. The IOGP brings together experts from member companies around the world to help provide guidance to solve challenges for upstream oil and gas operations. Some of these challenges are unique to those operations, and some are common across multiple industries.

One such issue is the ongoing problem of driving safety: many companies don't have a full complement of driving safety experts to improve performance. That's where the experts who gather for the IOGP make a difference. They can provide a framework for improvement and the reduction of risk encountered while driving. Their guidance, Land Transportation Safety Practice (Report 365) is the cumulative work over many years from driving safety experts and can be used by any company seeking to address their challenges in this area.



They introduce a means to measure and understand performance. They provide suggestions on the purchase of safer vehicles and driver assist systems. They

also introduce the concept of Journey Management, a means of assessing the risk of the trip to be taken. There is also guidance on the features for driver behavior monitoring in the form of In-Vehicle Monitoring Systems and In-Cab Cameras. Coupled with that, they cover the creation of programs to set the foundational expectations for driver performance.

Tom Knode was recently invited to speak to the IOGP about his experience and the challenges of adopting 365. Tom has worked with multiple companies to help improve their driving safety programs.

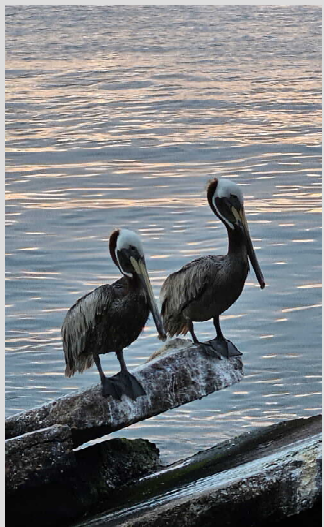
### **At the Podium**

vPSI Consultants are frequently called to speak at conferences and other events. Below are some chances to hear one or more of our consultants this year:

- Tom Knode will be speaking at The Conference Board's Chief EH&S Officers Council meeting on September 10, in Denver, CO. Tom will be speaking about his experience and provide strategies to engage employees in safety.
- Tom Knode will be a panelist, discussing "From Human Error to System Resilience: How Human Competences and Technology Shape the Safety of Energy Transition" at the SPE ATCE at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston, TX on October 21.
- Norman Ritchie will be speaking on "To SIF or Not to SIF: That is the Question" at two upcoming events. The first is the ASSP Region III Professional Development Conference, being held at the Hard Rock Café in Tulsa, OK, on September 24-25. The second is the Mary Kay O'Connor Process Safety Center's Risk and Safety Conference at the Westin Memorial City in Houston, TX. This conference takes place October 21-23.

### **Combining Business with Pleasure**

vPSI Consultants are always looking to add some non-work related joy to their visits around the world. Case in point, these brown pelicans brought a smile to Norman's face while he was attending the TCC Environment, Health, and Safety Seminar in Galveston, TX.



## Improving Safety and Operational Performance



vPSI Group is proud to announce that we'll be hosting a workshop at the Society of Petroleum Engineers International (SPE) Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition (ATCE), October 18th and 19th, in Houston, Texas. Norman Ritchie and Tom Knode will be leading this workshop, focused on Learning from Incidents and an introduction to HOP (Human and Organizational Performance). This two-day class will cover various aspects including the practical application of HOP and how to ensure companies learn from unplanned events. Here's a small selection of what will be covered:

- How Human Performance Factors Contribute to Unplanned Events, Including the Impact of Fitness for Duty
- The importance of HOP and Employee Engagement from an Operational Perspective
- How Employee Engagement Improves Performance
- Effective Conversations With Employees – How to Have Successful Talks to Motivate Employees
- Ensuring That the Organization's Resources Are Applied Appropriately to Events Based on Risk
- Efficiently Analyzing Unplanned Events, Including Near-Misses, in Less Time Using Methods Appropriate to the Complexity of the Underlying Problems
- The 2Box and HPA (Human Performance Analysis) Scalable Event Analysis Methodologies, Including Human Performance Causal Factors
- Quickly Producing Effective Corrective Actions That Reduce Risk and Maximize the Probability of Long-Term Performance Improvement and Organizational Learning Where Appropriate

## Bitcoin Mining

vPSI followers will know that the company provides services to a wide variety of operations and industries. Over the last few years, Principal Consultant David Perez has become deeply engaged in bitcoin mining using stranded and “waste” natural gas in the oilfield as the energy source. The vPSI business model frequently involves partnering with other specialist firms, and in the bitcoin space we have aligned with Verde Mining to provide a comprehensive 3-day training course designed for oil & gas professionals and prospective bitcoin mine operators. The program addresses a critical industry challenge: converting low-value or waste gas into profitable revenue streams while reducing emissions and regulatory exposure. The course covers the technical and business aspects of deploying and operating a natural gas bitcoin mining site, including field assessments and real-world experience in evaluating potential mining locations. There are two upcoming sessions: September 9-11 and November 4-6, with private sessions available upon request.

For information, visit [www.verdemining.com](http://www.verdemining.com) or contact [Mike@verdemining.com](mailto:Mike@verdemining.com).



## Out and About

vPSI Consultants frequently attend conferences, even when not speaking at them. Below are opportunities to catch up with our consultants before the end of the year:

- NSC (National Safety Council) Safety Conference and Expo, scheduled for September 12-18 at the Colorado Convention Center in Denver, CO.
- ASSP (American Society of Safety Professionals) Region III Professional Development Conference, scheduled for September 22-24 at the Hard Rock Hotel in Tulsa, OK.
- NSC Oil, Gas, and Energy Networks meeting, scheduled for September 30 to October 1 in Houston, TX.
- SPE Annual Technical Conference and Expo (ATCE) October 20-22 at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston, TX.
- NSC Global Network Meeting November 11-13 in Washington, DC.
- UTA (University of Texas Arlington) Oil and Gas Health and Safety Conference December 2-3 at the Hilton Americas in Houston, TX.



### From Dumb to Dope...

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**Demeaning:** For emotionally harmful or dignity-reducing work

**Delayed:** For inaction or procrastination in safety-critical decisions

These variants show that the D framework is no longer a fixed checklist, but a customizable heuristic tailored to sector, culture, or operational context. The principle remains the same: provoke useful conversation to surface risk and insight.

#### Why It Works: Shared Traits Across Domains

Despite different applications and modifications, the D frameworks in safety and the military share common strengths:

- **Memorability:** Uses simple, everyday language
- **Clarity:** Helps surface weak signals

- **Adaptability:** Customizable to culture and context
- **Learning-Focused:** Promotes reflection and curiosity

#### Conclusion

From its military origins to today's safety applications, the "D" framework has grown into a living tool for learning, culture, and leadership. Whether used in a learning team, an oilfield pre-task planning meeting, or an after action review, the essence of the D framework remains the same:

- **Encourage voice**
- **Cultivate awareness**
- **Trigger actionable insights**

Its strength is not just in its simplicity, but in its humanity - it speaks the language of real people doing real work in real conditions.

### Expert Investigation Support

No-one expects to have an incident on their site, and if one does happen, nobody wants it to happen again.

As an HSE leader, you know that a well-executed incident investigation does more than tick boxes, it uncovers actionable insights that reduce risk and enhance operational resilience. As even strong HSE teams can face capacity challenges or need an impartial perspective, especially after high-consequence or complex events, having a 3rd party outside consultant assist in the investigation can bring significant benefits.

vPSI Group provides experienced consultants to lead or support your investigations, helping you drive real learning, not just compliance.

vPSI consultants are subject matter experts who specialize in optimizing organizational learning from unplanned events. They are highly experienced individuals who bring immediate credibility to assignments. Often semi-retired after their primary careers, their many years of accumulated knowledge and deep industry expertise give our clients confidence that their involvement will lead to optimized organizational learning from unplanned events.

- ✓ Independent, high-quality investigation facilitation
- ✓ Expertise in learning-focused approaches including HOP, SIF, etc.
- ✓ Fast, low-disruption deployment and rapid turnaround
- ✓ Able to deploy various analytical techniques as appropriate
- ✓ Objectively apply evidence QA and corrective action QC
- ✓ Credibility with both frontline teams and executives
- ✓ Global reach

Trusted by leaders across high-risk industries, we help turn incidents into improvements. Let's discuss how we can assist you!