



Evolving from Specialist to Generalist

Being a specialist expert is only useful until it is not! The time to start making the move from depth of knowledge to breadth of perspective is when you take the step into management. Yet we constantly meet managers, even executives, who have not transitioned from a technical to a commercial mindset. This inability to take a whole of business approach maintains silos and reduces leadership team effectiveness. So why is specialist thinking so prevalent; and why has it seemingly become overvalued?

In recent history our universities and corporations have created the culture of the 'expert'. To use an analogy from Vikram Mansharamani - Lecturer at Yale University - if we think in terms of a forest, corporations around the world have come to value expertise and, in so doing, have created a collection of individuals studying bark. There are many who have deeply studied its nooks, grooves, coloration, and texture. Few have developed the understanding that the bark is merely the outermost layer of a tree. Fewer still understand the tree is embedded in a forest.

At the same time our global economy is getting more complex and uncertain. Research undertaken over recent years, by individuals including Professor Phillip Tetlock of the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School is providing robust data which suggests generalists are better at navigating uncertainty, are more risk tolerant and demonstrate greater levels of adaptability than specialists.

So how do we reverse the trend of greater and greater specialisation that has been dominant over the last 20 to 30 years? In order to facilitate that

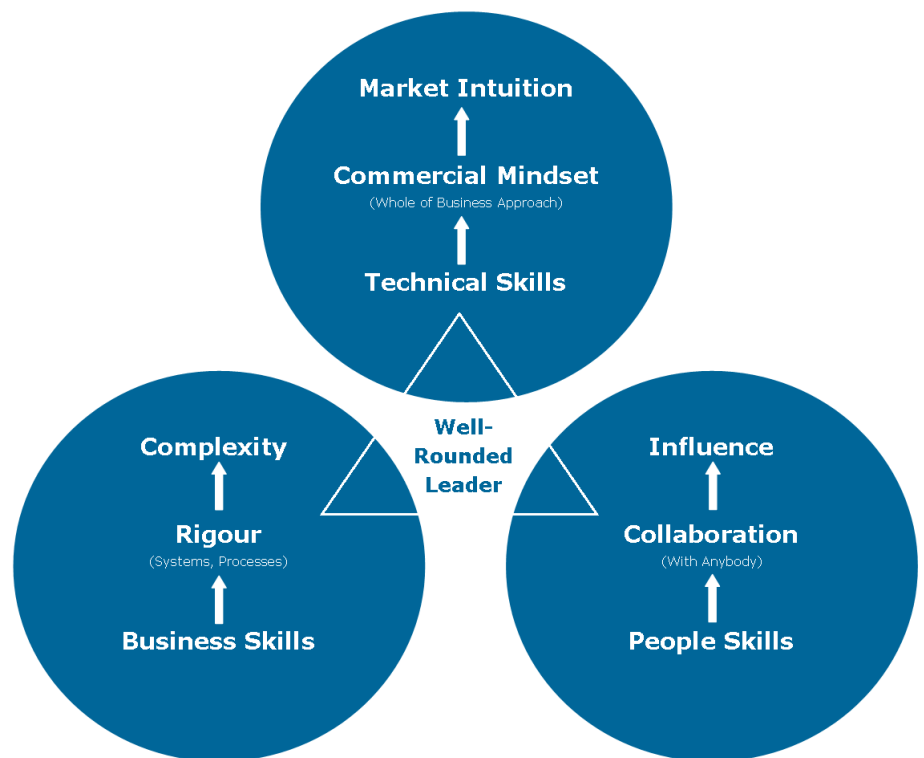
process it is important that companies become more comfortable in measuring management abilities beyond technical competencies and business outcomes. Whilst this has been happening with the recent focus on leadership capabilities and emotional intelligence, those have not been afforded anywhere near equal status when it comes to recruitment, remuneration and promotions.

To counter this trend we developed,

- Business / Management skills, and
- People / Leadership skills

Development in all 3 areas is required to become an effective leader. Most leaders either focus on the technical + business skills (task oriented leaders) or on the technical + people skills (people oriented leaders).

Our technical skills usually form the basis of our career. Most of us start out



and have been using, the 'Well-Rounded' Leader Model for several years in our leadership development and coaching work.

The 'Well-Rounded' Leader Model looks at the evolution of skills in 3 areas:

- Technical / Commercial skills

becoming experts in a particular field. As we strive to advance in the management hierarchy, we need to develop breadth, not depth, for role effectiveness. This means going from a narrow focus on my area to a whole of business approach. By developing a



commercial mindset we lay the foundation for becoming intuitive about where our industry and the market are going. We learn to present ideas in the form of business cases and start to take the needs of the whole business or value chain into account when thinking about decisions or changes we want to make. We make decisions for the good of the business as a whole vs. not just the good of an individual's area.

In the area of business and management skills in the first instance we all have to learn to manage ourselves (and not avoid our areas of weakness). This includes learning prioritising, risk management and getting tasks done. With the transition to management we gain increasing autonomy and decision making authority. The focus shifts from ourselves to creating and managing the systems and processes that make our teams and later the whole organisation successful. This requires developing rigour and self-discipline. Only after having learned to be rigorous can we progress to becoming adaptable; and seeing and dealing with complexity. Based on our experiences in being rigorous and making mistakes in the process our decision making becomes

more fluid and less reliant on procedures and guidelines.

Finally, we can't become effective as a leader without developing our people skills. The first step is progressing from social relationships to professional relationships. This means developing a 'professional persona' and dropping behaviours considered inappropriate in the workplace. Transitioning into a leadership roles starts with empathy and taking a genuine interest in other people. We will have to learn to set aside our natural behavioural style when collaborating with people who are very different. Once again this requires rigour, maturity and self-discipline. Then we can learn how to influence anybody, not just the people who (are) like us.

One pattern we see often is oscillating between level 1 and 3 and bypassing 2 e.g. from people skills to influencing, bypassing collaboration with everyone. It results in a manager being only able to influence the people who they would naturally influence; and bypassing the rest. The result is a 'hit and miss' approach that reduces overall leadership/business effectiveness.

Business needs to develop a greater understanding that the evolution from specialist knowledge to generalist perspective is incredibly valuable. This, in turn, will drive managers to attain a greater willingness to learn and grow in all of these areas.

So why has the generalist become so 'unsexy'? Possibly it is the negative connotations around the generalist - 'jack of all trades, master of none'. Certainly the much more positive term polymath (from the Greek 'having learned much') has been dropped from our vocabulary. When we do talk about polymaths the examples we use are often Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo, Francis Bacon, Goethe and Isaac Newton. An article for Intelligent Life Magazine, arguing that in the age of specialisation, the polymath has become an endangered species triggered an experiment by magazines' staff. They decided to make a list of 20 living polymaths, which included individuals such as Noam Chomsky, Nathan Myhrvold and Clive James. What was telling more than anything else was that the average age of the 20 listed was 68. You couldn't make a stronger case for the need to reverse the trend.



Lynn Johnson, Managing Director

Lynn originates from the UK and immigrated to Australia in 1996. She holds a PhD in particle physics and has worked as a research physicist for ICI in the UK before embarking on a journey that led her from a career in management consulting to becoming the CEO of a charity and setting up Leadership Mastery in 2001.

Lynn has extensive experience in designing and delivering programs that help people learn more about themselves, make better choices and open their mind to new possibilities. Her focus over recent years has been to coach business leaders in gaining self-awareness, developing emotional intelligence and leadership flexibility. This extensive background in coaching has allowed her to develop the coaching tools and interventions for Leadership Mastery.

Lynn is qualified in Human Synergistics LSI, DiSC, NLP, and other coaching tools. She has delivered in excess of 2,500 hours of individual coaching and over 1,500 hours of group coaching to business leaders over the past 11 years.



Peter Lanius, Director

Peter originates from Berlin, Germany and immigrated to Australia in 1996. He holds a PhD in particle physics. Peter spent the first ten years of his career as a consultant and project manager in the IT&T industry. He held senior project management positions in blue-chip companies including Hewlett-Packard, Telstra and Texas Instruments. Throughout this time Peter placed great

emphasis on coaching his staff and creating successful teams.

In 2002 Peter became a director of Leadership Mastery. Peter has a keen interest in human development, psychology, coaching, behavioural economics, neuroscience, advanced communication strategies and change management. These interests have led him to attend a broad range of trainings and seminars; he puts these learnings into practice in his coaching work.

He has attained qualifications in Human Synergistics LSI, DiSC, NLP, Time Line Therapy, Hypnosis, EFT/TFT and a number of other coaching tools and techniques. He has delivered over 2,000 hours of individual coaching and over 500 hours of group coaching to business leaders and managers over the past 9 years.

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