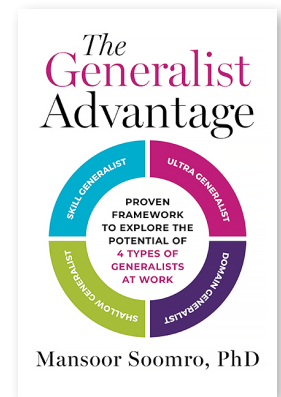


# Executive Book Summaries®

## The Generalist Advantage

Proven Framework to Explore the Potential of 4 Types of Generalists at Work

by Mansoor Soomro, PhD



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### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In an era defined by specialization, and now accelerated by artificial intelligence, the modern workplace increasingly needs people who can connect ideas across disciplines, adapt quickly, and solve problems that don't fit neatly into one domain. Yet many professionals struggle to break out of narrow roles, lacking a clear roadmap for developing the broad, integrative mindset of today's economy demands.

*The Generalist Advantage: Proven Framework to Explore the Potential of 4 Types of Generalists at Work* argues that generalists are not just useful but essential. It presents a structured, research-backed path for anyone seeking to broaden their capabilities and become more versatile, creative and future-ready.

Through practical tools such as The Generalist Advantage Framework—which outlines four distinct types of generalists—and The Generalist Quotient Self-Assessment, Mansoor Soomro provides a clear way for readers to identify their current generalist profile and take deliberate steps toward developing the one best suited to their goals.

### IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

- Find out how to use the TGA™ framework to identify themes across your skills, interests and experiences, and turn them into a compelling narrative
- Learn how to understand the LOSS™ model and counter the stagnation that often affects deep specialists
- Get useful tips on how to apply SDSU™ workplace strategies to navigate perceptions, communicate your value and thrive as a generalist
- Understand how to develop future-ready skills, including creative problem solving, multidisciplinary learning and complex decision-making

## Introduction

Expertise is often equated with success, so the generalist concept may seem out of place. Yet, in the tapestry of human endeavor, a thread exists that weaves through the fabric of history, connecting individuals who defy the confines of narrow expertise. This thread speaks to the power and resilience of the generalist, those who embrace the breadth of interests, knowledge, skills, and experiences that transcend the boundaries of any single discipline or expertise.

When we are told to *narrow our focus* or to *stay in our lane*, we miss out on something profoundly special. Our greatest strengths often lie in that willingness to dance on the borders of multiple fields, finding unique synergies that drive real-world impact.

In the modern world, with its dizzying speed of artificial intelligence (AI), this generalist perspective is not merely quirky; it's very much necessary. More than ever, we need adaptable problem solvers, unorthodox thinkers who connect the seemingly unconnected, and lifelong learners who can thrive in a world of constantly shifting knowledge and skill sets.

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### CHAPTER 1

## Embracing the Generalist Mindset

A *generalist* is someone who possesses a wide range of interests, knowledge, abilities, or experiences (as opposed to a specialist, who carries a deep focus on a specific interest, knowledge, ability, or experience).

Whether it's embracing diverse skills or understanding different industries, generalists play a crucial role in our ever-evolving world. Generalists tend to have a diverse set of interests and abilities, allowing them to adapt and excel in various situations or roles. They often thrive in environments that require flexibility, creativity, and the ability to connect ideas from different fields.

Moreover, they are masters of mash-ups. Instead of seeing knowledge in neat little boxes, they see it all jumbled together. They make crazy connections that other people miss, such as seeing how fixing a car has something in common with treating a patient or solving an accounting problem. And here is the best part: when faced with a new challenge, they're less likely to get stuck with the same old approach. They pull from different things they've learned, experiment way more, and often end up surprising themselves with unexpected solutions leading to multiple possibilities.

## Who Is Not a Generalist?

Someone who is not a generalist is typically referred to as a specialist. Specialists focus on a narrow area of interest, knowledge, ability, or experience to develop proficiency in a specific field or subject. Specialists are also known as experts and niche leaders.

Unlike generalists, specialists may have limited exposure to or interest in areas outside their specialized field or domain. They excel in roles requiring highly specialized knowledge (like an aircraft pilot) or technical expertise (like a nuclear power plant engineer) and may find it challenging to adapt to tasks or responsibilities outside their narrow focus.

## Debunking 10 Myths of Generalists

Let's debunk some of the most persistent myths about generalists:

***Myth 1: Generalists are less productive than specialists.***

Reality: With rapidly changing fields, technology disruptions, and global issues demanding cross-domain solutions, generalists have the potential to be more productive as they can pivot easily and join seemingly unrelated trends.

***Myth 2: Generalists lack focus and direction.***

Reality: Interest in many things doesn't equal scatterbrained. Good generalists make connections, transferring knowledge between fields.

***Myth 3: Generalists are not good decision-makers.***

Reality: While some struggle to decide which interest to explore first, a mature generalist has greater self-knowledge. Knowing diverse skills gives them the power to make more informed decisions.

***Myth 4: Generalists are not effective team players.***

Reality: Generalists flourish as empathetic listeners, facilitating dialogues between those with divergent views. They're excellent collaborators, recognizing diverse talents and bridging divides within teams.

***Myth 5: Generalists cannot be good mentors at work.***

Reality: Generalists excel as "exploration guides." They help mentees identify connections between areas of interest, develop effective learning strategies, and embrace challenges with resilience.

***Myth 6: Generalists are largely extroverts.***

Reality: Absolutely not true! There are introverted generalists, just like extroverted generalists, thriving in different senior and junior roles in organizations.

Our greatest strengths often lie in a willingness to dance on the borders of multiple fields.

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***Myth 7: Generalists are mostly mediocre in performance.***

Reality: This boils down to how we define success and excellence. If it's based solely on traditional markers of niche mastery, then sure. However, it ignores the inherent strengths generalists develop: innovative problem-solving, pattern recognition, and sense-making.

***Myth 8: Generalists are only good at entry-level positions.***

Reality: While early in their careers, generalists may take on unrelated roles for experience, their ability to adapt and learn propels them into unique senior positions. Companies are recognizing the value in leadership who understand the big picture and bridge teams with disparate expertise.

***Myth 9: Generalists only fit into start-up environments.***

Reality: Certainly, a start-up environment is often a generalist's playground. Yet, established companies increasingly leverage innovation for that generalist ability of their executives to disrupt routines and generate solutions that would go unnoticed within siloed departments.

***Myth 10: Generalists are easily replaceable.***

Reality: Highly skilled generalists with proven value-add within companies or projects are the opposite of replaceable. Their unique lens, coupled with the ability to collaborate effectively across different silos, makes them irreplaceable as connectors and knowledge integrators.

## Six Superpowers of Generalists

In modern work environments emphasizing complexity and innovation, the generalist's mindset and skill set offer immense value. They foster collaboration, excel in rapidly changing conditions, and act as catalysts for fresh ideas and solutions, just to mention a few arguments advocating the power of generalists in the workplace. These six “superpowers” show how generalists translate that value into real workplace impact:

- They spur innovation.
- They are bridge builders.
- They value foresight.
- They are brilliant adapters.
- They champion resilience.
- They foster learning culture.

## CHAPTER 2

### Redefining Expertise in a Shifting Landscape

Generalists and specialists represent two distinct lines to acquiring knowledge and leveraging experience. Specialists see generalists' leaps as recklessness and are often baffled by how generalists arrive at conclusions seemingly out of thin air. Generalists, on the other hand, see specialists' caution as an obstacle to progress and think their obsession with details is pure madness.

Both are different in terms of their individual strengths and limitations. Here are some key differences between them in terms of the impact they have on the workplace:

- **Breadth vs depth.** Generalists possess a broad range of knowledge and skills across multiple disciplines or domains. Specialists, on the other hand, focus on acquiring deep expertise in a narrow field or subject area.
- **Versatility vs specialization.** Generalists are versatile and adaptable, able to apply their skills and knowledge in a variety of contexts and situations. Specialists are highly specialized in a specific area, often possessing in-depth knowledge and expertise that may have limited applicability outside of their domain.
- **Problem-solving approach.** Generalists tend to approach problems with a broad perspective, considering multiple factors, perspectives, and solutions. Specialists approach problems with a narrow focus, leveraging their deep expertise to analyze issues within their specialized domain.
- **Learning approach.** Generalists prioritize learning across a wide range of subjects and disciplines, often seeking out diverse experiences and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Specialists focus their learning efforts on acquiring in-depth knowledge and expertise within their specialized area.
- **Career opportunities.** Generalists may pursue diverse career paths and opportunities, as their broad skill set and adaptable mindset allow them to transition between different roles, industries, and functions. Specialists often pursue careers within their specialized field, leveraging their deep expertise to advance their careers and make significant contributions within their narrow domain.

### Generalists and Near Future Readiness

The world of work is changing too much and too fast. A lot of jobs are being displaced due to AI's influence. With these shifting landscapes and changes, it is difficult to rely on experts as their expertise might not be needed the same way moving forward. Now is the time when generalists will rise.

*Near Future Readiness* refers to the ability of individuals and organizations to anticipate, adapt to, and thrive in an increasingly uncertain and rapidly changing but predictable time frame. Some of the aspects of near future readiness include:

- **Strategic foresight** – anticipating near future trends, opportunities, and challenges and developing strategies to address them proactively.
- **Tactical adaptability** – the ability to change plans and strategies quickly in response to shifting circumstances on the ground.
- **Ecosystem thinking** – viewing the business as part of a larger ecosystem.

Near future readiness is about planning as well as experimentation. In terms of planning, businesses scream for better research to make investments in talent upskilling and upgrading organizational infrastructure.

Generalist leaders, due to their wide interests, have better insights, which helps in planning. In terms of bold experimentation, businesses are demanding a greater tolerance for failure and a willingness to pivot if their early bets go wrong. Generalists here again, due to their exploratory mindset, can help steer course corrections quickly.

Overall, generalists excel at near future readiness for three main reasons:

1. They are pattern seekers.
2. They are above-average idea adapters.
3. They enjoy being comfortable with the unknown.

### Near Future Readiness Index (NFRI)<sup>™</sup>

Recognizing the distinction between the future and the near future, as well as the importance of being prepared for the latter, it is time to introduce the Near Future Readiness Index (NFRI).

This index identifies crucial indicators essential for navigating the near future. Its purpose is to assist leaders in preparing for both negative and positive events or situations within a predictable time frame.

The NFRI is built around eight core indicators:

- critical thinking
- cognitive flexibility (thinking)
- contextual intelligence (application)
- grit personality
- agile learner
- intrepid change maker
- big-picture strategist
- team synergist

In constructing the Near Future Readiness Index, the objective is not to devise a single metric but rather to gauge a *composite score* that is built on key parameters of leadership.

For instance, adaptability as a parameter is about the capacity to learn new skills, shift directions, and embrace change swiftly with less resistance than those clinging to the status quo. Similar to that, innovation as a parameter focuses on the ability to generate, develop, and implement novel solutions. This goes beyond mere ideas, incorporating a bias for action.

### Defining The Generalist Advantage (TGA)<sup>™</sup>

Returning to the debate on generalists versus specialists, a pertinent question arises: *which group is better equipped for the near future?*

In terms of near future readiness, generalists score higher than specialists overall in navigating in times of uncertainty, identifying nascent trends, leading potential disruptions, and highlighting emerging opportunities for product and market developments.

Generalists are more ready for the near future based on all eight NFRI indicators, whereas specialists are largely ready for the near future in terms of two NFRI indicators (critical thinking and grit personality).

There are a number of research studies investigating the link between generalist-led businesses and disruptive innovation. These studies show that the following four business situations can be a good start to magnify *The Generalist Advantage*:

- **Leadership roles.** Generalist leaders equipped with a multiperspective understanding can be a leadership compass in guiding strategy, innovation, and cross-functional collaboration within organizations.
- **Unstructured problems.** Facing ill-defined, ambiguous challenges with undefined best practices requires the out-of-the-box thinking of a generalist.

# Generalist leaders bring better insights to planning and greater tolerance for bold experimentation.



- **New product development.** Generating fresh product or service concepts through drawing on diverse inspiration sources becomes a key generalist strength.
- **Change management.** Generalists excel in anticipating the ripples of change across teams and adapting processes to foster resilience during periods of transition.

Overall, *The Generalist Advantage* empowers individuals to thrive in today's multifaceted and interconnected world by leveraging their diverse skills, adaptable mindset, and interdisciplinary approach to problem-solving.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Age of AI and the Rise of Generalists

Whether you're an artist, a problem solver, or a communicator, embracing both complementary and especially contrasting skills enhances your journey through life. Put simply, a *skill* is the ability to perform a task with proficiency. In today's age of AI, success relies on empowering individuals to collaborate effectively with intelligent systems, demanding a new, collaborative skill set.

*Complementary skills* (also known as related skills) are those abilities that complement or enhance each other when combined. Complementary skills work best for specialists and experts as they solidify their specific domain and develop more skills by enriching their radius around their desk and team.

On the other hand, *contrasting skills* (also known as unrelated skills) are those abilities that contrast or differ from each other in nature or approach. These skills provide diversity and balance within a team or individual, offering cognitive diversity and different perspectives and approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. Contrasting skills work best for *generalist-type profiles*.

Both types of skills are valuable in their own right and can contribute to individual and team success when leveraged appropriately. In the age of AI, where technology can take care of basic tasks and humans can work on superior tasks, recognizing and understanding the complementary and contrasting skills between humans and various AI tools,

technologies, and platforms can lead to more effective collaboration, decision-making, and problem-solving.

For both specialists and generalists, a balance between these two skill types is beneficial, as both complementary and contrasting skills play a pivotal role in various aspects of life, both personally and professionally.

### Portable Skills as the Key to Professional Resilience

*Portable skills* (also known as transferable skills or universal skills) are abilities that aren't confined to a single job, role, or industry. They help you thrive in varied tasks and make you adaptable across different career paths. Think of them as the foundation you take with you from experience to experience, rather than hyper-niche skills tied to one specific task. The concern of whether AI will replace or displace jobs can be best countered by investing in portable skills.

Employers across industries are looking for transferable strengths to thrive in the unprecedented age of human-computer interaction. For example, your ability to communicate, work in teams, or think critically makes you a valuable addition regardless of your technical experience.

By developing portable skills, you can enhance your employability, adaptability, and effectiveness in a variety of roles and contexts, setting yourself up for success in your career and beyond. The eight NFRI indicators mentioned before are all portable skills, and, as shared earlier, generalists perform better than specialists against most of those near future readiness indicators.

## CHAPTER 4

### Four Types of Generalists at Work

#### Shallow, Domain, Skill, Ultra (SDSU)<sup>™</sup> Generalist Framework

After studying the various flavors of generalists in my eight years of research on the topic, I was drawn to the point that there could be three ways to understand the classification of different types of generalists:

1. portable skills and cross-industry adaptability
2. expertise and perspectives
3. skills and domains

Let's look into each of the four types of generalists individually:

### Type 1: Shallow Generalist (S)

A shallow generalist (also known as a hyper-specialist) is someone who has one major skill predominately in one domain/industry.

Shallow generalists are specialists who are *master of one* in the jack-of-all-trades, master of none proverb. They dive deep and contribute substantially to any single field. However, this is often a case of unreliable expertise.

Shallow generalists share a set of defining characteristics:

- **Deep expertise.** Shallow generalists possess in-depth knowledge and honed skills in their specific field. Their niche area allows them to solve complex problems, recognize subtle patterns, and provide unique insights not found in generalists on that topic.
- **Attention to detail.** Shallow generalists understand that every detail matters. Their meticulous approach ensures accuracy, thoroughness, and quality output.
- **Focus.** Shallow generalists are passionate about their chosen focus and are highly dedicated, able to persevere through challenges and complex projects.

To avoid becoming a shallow generalist, it's important to focus on a few core practices:

- explore diverse topics
- develop versatility
- network and collaborate
- stay informed

### Type 2: Domain Generalist (D)

A domain generalist (also known as an industry generalist) is someone who has one major skill but exposure to a few different domains/industries. Domain generalists' adaptability is impressive as it offers distinct advantages in today's fast-paced business landscapes. Typically, a domain generalist has a comprehensive understanding of various industries and their sectors, including their operations, trends, challenges, and opportunities.

Domain generalists play a crucial role in driving innovation, growth, and competitiveness within their respective industries

by leveraging their deep cross-industry expertise to seize opportunities for business progression.

Domain generalists share several defining characteristics that reflect how they operate across industries:

- **Industry knowledge and exposure.** Domain generalists have a good understanding of the inner workings, trends, and dynamics of selected industries, acquired through their rotation in different industry sectors.
- **Identifying external opportunities.** Domain generalists excel at industry-specific challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities, proving to be highly informed problem solvers and outside-in innovation catalysts.
- **Networking and relationship-building.** Domain generalists have a strong network of contacts and relationships across sectors between different industries, allowing them to collaborate, share insights, and stay informed about industry best practices.

Becoming a domain generalist requires intentionally expanding your view across industries while continuing to deepen expertise in related sectors. The following steps outline how to do both in parallel:

1. **Map your landscape.** Understand how subsectors, processes, and roles connect within and across industries. Actively learn from people at different levels to uncover blind spots and operational realities.
2. **Build a strategic learning plan.** Expand your information sources beyond your core domain to spot patterns, gaps, and emerging opportunities. Engage with adjacent disciplines to challenge assumptions, surface blind spots, and refresh perspective.
3. **Diversify your projects and activities.** Take on cross-functional work to broaden how you apply your expertise. Complement internal projects with external experiences to accelerate learning across industries.

### Type 3: Skill Generalist (S)

A skill generalist is someone who has a few different skills predominately in one domain/industry. Skill generalists often excel at adapting to new roles, projects, and challenges by leveraging their broad skill set. They are catalysts for problem-solving. Their skills can be soft skills (leadership skills) as well as hard skills (technical skills).

The strengths of skill generalists are reflected in several defining characteristics:

The ability to work outside one's domain is increasingly valuable in today's interconnected and rapidly changing business environment. ”

- **Diverse skill set.** Skill generalists possess a range of skills across different areas, including technical, creative, analytical, interpersonal, and leadership skills.
- **Problem-solving abilities.** Skill generalists excel at analyzing complex problems, identifying root causes, and developing innovative solutions by drawing on their diverse skill sets and multiskilled perspectives.
- **Communication and collaboration.** Skill generalists possess strong communication and collaboration skills, enabling them to work effectively with differently skilled and talented individuals.

Becoming a skill generalist means intentionally building a broad set of abilities while focusing on how those skills combine and transfer over time. This approach unfolds through a few deliberate practices:

- **Embrace the learning mindset.** Pursue curiosity beyond your job description and experiment with new skills deliberately and broadly without aiming for immediate mastery. Early focus on foundations helps you recognize how skills transfer across domains.
- **Practice strategic skill development.** Build on your natural strengths and prioritize skills that complement one another. Emphasize transferable meta-skills—such as problem-solving, communication, and iteration—that compound across roles.
- **Apply skills through practice.** Treat learning as project-based and look for low-risk opportunities to apply new skills. Documenting your process reinforces learning and makes progress visible to yourself and others.

#### Type IV: Ultra Generalist (U)

An ultra generalist is someone who has multiple skills in multiple domains/industries. An ultra generalist with a broad range of skills across multiple disciplines is the supreme level of a generalist, implying a level of proficiency in various fields.

Ultra generalists are by definition polymaths and Renaissance thinkers. These individuals may work independently or within organizations, pursuing intellectual exploration across fields. They often contribute as authors, speakers,

consultants, and futurists, sharing insights from their cross-disciplinary perspectives.

#### Characteristics:

- **Cross-functional breadth.** Ultra generalists have a vast and comprehensive breadth of skills that can be applied to multiple business functions, including HR, finance, marketing, IT, and general management.
- **Multidisciplinary expertise.** Ultra generalists excel at integrating insights from different fields of study to solve complex problems, generate innovative ideas, and drive collaboration in various industries.
- **Versatility.** Ultra generalists are highly adaptable and flexible in acquiring and applying skills to a wide range of roles, projects, scenarios, and environments.

#### How to Become an Ultra Generalist

Becoming an ultra generalist means pursuing breadth with intention—connecting ideas across disciplines while continuously refining how you learn and explore.

1. **Embrace the pursuit of knowledge.** Cultivate insatiable curiosity and treat learning as intellectual play rather than outcome-driven work. Deliberately explore across paradigms to challenge assumptions and break linear thinking.
2. **Master meta-learning skills.** Develop systems for rapid knowledge acquisition, pattern recognition, and idea synthesis. These meta-learning abilities allow ultra generalists to absorb, connect, and apply insights from widely different domains.
3. **Follow an intentional but nonlinear path.** Balance focused exploration with a clear sense of purpose while remaining open to unexpected discoveries. Embracing serendipity helps transform curiosity into original insight rather than unfocused accumulation.

Pragmatically speaking, this discussion about the four types of generalists is more about a spectrum than it is about rigid boxes. It is important to understand that the maturity curve applies here. A shallow generalist can evolve over time toward becoming a domain generalist or a skill generalist, or perhaps both.

In the grand scheme of things, a mix of generalists at various levels, paired strategically with deep specialists (shallow generalists), is the way for innovative organizations to unlock their true potential.

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### CHAPTER 5

## Domain and Skill Variation of Different Generalists

The Law of Specialist Saturation (LOSS) states that while the initial introduction of specialists yields significant improvements in specific areas, beyond a certain point the marginal benefits of additional specialization decrease.

To sustain and enhance overall organizational performance, generalists are essential in optimizing business results. In other words, the Law of Specialist Saturation highlights the danger of overreliance on specialists and elevates the critical role of generalists in optimizing organizational performance.

For specialists, the productivity curve initially rises steeply as they gain deep expertise in a narrow field, reaching a peak at the expert saturation point. At this stage, their productivity levels off, indicating that additional experience or knowledge gains offer diminishing returns.

In contrast, generalists show a more gradual but sustained increase in productivity. Instead of plateauing, the generalist curve continues to rise beyond the expert saturation point, illustrating how their broader skill sets and adaptability allow them to maintain and even enhance productivity over a longer career lifespan.

### Why Is It a “Loss”?

My research over the years has led me to believe that professionals largely work on intentional specialization first and then they look out for planned exploration. They mostly prioritize a path of deliberate specialization as a foundation but incorporate structured periods of cross-field exploration later.

It is a loss as planned exploration is often late, and it results in specialists becoming complacent. Moreover, it does not allow generalists to flourish in good times in their careers to gain wider roots and ventures.

So working outside the domain—your industry base—means possessing the adaptability to contribute effectively in fields beyond your primary expertise. The ability to work outside one’s domain is increasingly valuable in today’s interconnected and rapidly changing business environment.

This capability allows individuals to leverage their expertise and adaptability to tackle challenges and contribute to projects beyond their primary area of specialization.

### Ability to Acquire New Skills

Acquiring new skills can take the form of either upskilling or re-skilling.

Enhancing existing skills and acquiring new skills to improve performance in a current role is called *upskilling*. The focus here is to stay current with industry advancements and evolving job requirements related to your existing role, mostly through complementary skills.

*Re-skilling*, on the other hand, is about learning entirely new skills to transition into a different role, either within the company or in a new field. The focus here is on adapting to major workplace changes and opening new career pathways, mostly through contrasting skills.

Extending the discussion on upskilling and re-skilling, it is worth understanding the distinction between hard skills and soft skills, especially in the context of generalists: hard skills (also known as technical skills) represent specific know-how or training acquired through education, work experience, or specialized courses, whereas soft skills (also known as leadership skills) are traits that shape how we work with others and navigate workplace dynamics. Generalists excel in a variety of roles by balancing their hard skills with soft skills.

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### CHAPTER 6

## The Generalist’s Role in Innovation and Problem-Solving

Generalists thrive in uncertain environments by combining adaptability, critical thinking, and collaboration. Their practical insights empower them to make informed decisions and positively affect the team (and the organization) they serve.

To do better in uncertain times, leaders need better *sight*. There are four types of sights that leaders can center on:

- **Hindsight** – the ability to understand the nature of a situation clearly only after it has happened.
- **Oversight** – the act of closely supervising or managing teams, processes, or operations.
- **Insight** – a deep and accurate understanding of something, often a complex situation or concept.
- **Foresight** – the ability to anticipate or predict future events or developments and plan accordingly.

When we are told to narrow our focus or stay on our lane, we miss out on something profoundly special.

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Each type of generalist approaches unknown or unpredictable situations differently:

- Shallow generalists are known for their hindsight.
- Domain generalists are known for their oversight.
- Skill generalists are known for their insight.
- Ultra generalists are known for their foresight.

### Generalists Tackling with Complexity

Generalists are often better equipped to deal with complexity due to their broad skill set and interdisciplinary work exposure. Dealing with complexity is about the thought process, and there are four thinking styles that we often see in today's workplaces:

- **Silo thinking** – focusing only on your own department, team, or area of expertise, without considering the bigger picture.
- **Divergent thinking** – generating as many ideas as possible, exploring all sorts of possibilities, and thinking outside the box.
- **Convergent thinking** – narrowing down ideas, evaluating options, and making logical decisions.
- **Holistic thinking** – seeing the big picture, understanding interconnectedness, and considering the long-term impacts of decisions.

Generalists use different types of thinking patterns, categorized by their approach to tackling with complexity:

- Shallow generalists are known for their silo thinking.
- Domain generalists are known for their divergent thinking.
- Skill generalists are known for their convergent thinking.
- Ultra generalists are known for their holistic thinking.

### Innovation Ins and Outs of Generalists

Innovation is about creating value, as much as it is about uniqueness. Moreover, it is about introducing new ideas, methods, processes, products, or services that can enhance the productivity of an organization. It is not a surprise that generalists fuel innovation.

There are two main approaches to innovation:

- **Inside-out innovation** begins with the company's internal strengths, expertise, and existing technologies.
- **Outside-in innovation** begins by deeply understanding customers' needs, pain points, and desires.

Similar to this, there are two other aspects of innovation:

- **Explorative innovation** focuses on creating entirely new products, services, or business models.
- **Exploitative innovation** focuses on refining and improving existing products, services, or processes.

Here's how to apply the SDSU framework to innovation results in different generalists:

- Shallow generalists are best for inside-out innovation.
- Domain generalists are best for outside-in innovation.
- Skill generalists are best for inside-out innovation.
- Ultra generalists are best for outside-in innovation.

### Problem-Solving Modes of Generalists

Generalists employ various problem-solving modes to tackle challenges and drive solutions across different domains, including experimental, pragmatic, ethical, and iterative problem-solving modes. They are generally better at lateral thinking, a problem-solving approach that involves looking at issues from unconventional angles.

In talking about generalists and the problem-solving conundrum, we need to discuss the approach of zooming in (focusing on the nitty-gritty of a problem) and zooming out (taking a big-picture view of the problem).

Taking the zoom perspective further, let's talk about focus. There are four types of focus:

- **Deep focus** – intense, sustained concentration on a single task for an extended period, minimizing distractions.
- **Micro focus** – focus on the smallest, most immediate actions within a task or project.
- **Macro focus** – the big-picture view of your goals, projects, and priorities.

- **Meta focus** – built on the “why” behind what you’re doing.

Different generalists use different focus approaches to problem-solving:

- Shallow generalists are known for deep focus.
- Domain generalists are known for macro focus.
- Skill generalists are known for micro focus.
- Ultra generalists are known for meta focus.

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### CHAPTER 7

## The Generalist Advantage in Action

Four case studies involving the four types of generalists reveal important lessons about The Generalist Advantage and how each type deals with unique and challenging situations. Here are the key takeaways:

- **Learn from the shallow generalist.** Avoid analysis paralysis and take decisive action, when necessary, even with limited information.
- **Emulate the domain generalist.** Leverage your domain expertise to adapt to new industries and roles.
- **Apply the skill generalist approach.** Utilize your core skills to tackle diverse challenges and opportunities.
- **Embrace the ultra generalist mindset.** Thrive in uncertainty by embracing change and continuous learning.

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### CHAPTER 8

## The Generalist Quotient (GQ)<sup>™</sup>

The Generalist Quotient (GQ) is the measure of an individual’s ability to apply a wide range of skills across various domains. It highlights their versatility, adaptability, and capacity to integrate diverse perspectives.

You can use a free online GQ self-assessment to ascertain your generalist type based on the SDSU framework and develop a road map for self-development to capitalize on The Generalist Advantage.

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## Conclusion

*The Generalist Advantage* empowers us to approach problems from multiple angles, drawing upon insights from diverse domains to arrive at creative and innovative solutions. It fosters

a spirit of collaboration and empathy, recognizing the value of diverse perspectives in addressing complex issues and driving positive change.

But embracing the generalist mindset is not without its challenges. It requires us to confront our own limitations, to step outside of our areas of expertise, and to embrace the discomfort of the unknown. It demands patience, perseverance, and a willingness to embrace failure as an essential part of the learning process.

Yet, for those who dare to embrace the generalist mindset, the rewards are abundant. It empowers us to make meaningful contributions to the world around us, whether through our work, relationships, or creative endeavors.

In today’s era of rapid change where AI influence and impact is fundamentally rewriting the why and how we work, a generalist is bound to thrive. They adapt when paradigms shift, for their toolbox is not rigid—it expands. When art merges with science, when education blends with gamification, when innovation challenges tradition, when creativity meets constraints, and when passion collides with practicality, the generalist steps forward, unafraid.



**Dr. Mansoor Soomro** is a futurist, thought leader, and author whose work appears in major international media, including the *Daily Mail*, *Yahoo*, *Raconteur*, and *HRD America*. He has been invited to speak by organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, and Cambridge University. Championing a human-centric approach to work, he advises organizations through keynotes, executive education, leadership development, and consulting. He is the author of *The Generalist Advantage* and host of the *In Conversation podcast*. Dr. Mansoor serves on the *Harvard Business Review* Advisory Council and holds multiple international professional certifications focused on strategy, talent, and organizational transformation worldwide.

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