

The Art of Doing It All

“And what shade of foundation do you think will be perfect for my skin tone? Can you please apply some of it on me and show me how it looks?” I asked Charithra as I try and understand the depth of her product knowledge and application as well as communication skills. Charithra, more often known as Cherry, is our Beauty Advisor (BA i.e. in-store promoter) for Maybelline New York brand in Naina Fancy store, Udupi – a small coastal town in Karnataka, South India. Charithra quickly asks me what kind of finish I would like- matte, semi-matte or satin; and how much coverage I am looking for- high, medium or natural looking. With my answer, she proceeds to giving me an express makeover while we discuss her career aspirations.

One of my agendas during this visit to west Karnataka was to recruit a make-up expert for our brand based out of the region; a specialist who can in turn coach other promoters in Udupi and nearby towns thereby driving cosmetics’ sales through education and better customer service. Charithra wants to take on more responsibility, grow in her career and also proves herself to be the best candidate in all of Mangalore, Manipal and Udupi. We negotiate her salary increment details along with this promotion and start looking for another BA as her replacement in Naina store.

Fair bit of tasks related to the Human Resources function but as an Area Sales Manager for L’Oréal India for Karnataka state, I am not only responsible for delivering the sales targets of our cosmetics and skincare portfolio but also for managing teams that are responsible for over 350 promoters like Cherry across 8 towns. These teams manage the recruitment of the promoters and are accountable for their output as well as attrition. While I also manage a separate team of 8 make-up experts, I am required to identify which promoters need coaching by these make-up experts and with that training input, how much incremental sales we can expect in these promoters’ stores. Collectively, we as a team also look into store-wise merchandising requirements and coordinate with the merchandising management team to improve the brands’ presence in the same. And last but the least, analyzing competition’s performance, particularly in key stores, and creating customized plans to gain market share in them.

Combining the verticals of sales, people management, training, merchandising and strategy; the sales manager’s role is to deliver growth in his or her territory. Simply put, the work is ‘multi-disciplinary’ as Peter Drucker described, “...a lot of it had come out of accounting. And some of it came out of psychology. And some more came out of labor relations. Each of those fields was

considered separate, and each of them, by itself, was ineffectual.”¹ Only when you toss the ingredients together and toss them well do you get the perfect recipe.

What he also said was that the work of management was to make people capable of joint performance, to make their strengths effective and their weaknesses irrelevant.² But how do you equip teams to deliver on their work objectives if you are not adept with all the fundamentals that the work involves? Is it even possible? Identifying and hiring the best talent, keeping in mind the cultural and team fit, also requires every manager to understand basics of human resources, regardless of whether the manager belongs to the HR department. Managing the ‘volunteer’ knowledge workers³ also means that the manager ought to understand what drives them—challenging work, job satisfaction or other rewards and motivating them to achieve the same.

The concept of Renaissance man is not dissimilar – being a true renaissance man meant developing one as much as possible by learning knowledge in different areas, embodying a polymath. A key principle of Humanism states that human beings have limitless potential for self-development and the notion of Renaissance man draws from it as well. Originated centuries ago, in a continent far from Udupi, but still is relevant in today’s times and the environment our organizations exist in:

1. **Bringing in a wider perspective:** In the 21st century where technology is regularly being upgraded, information is continuously being gathered and yesterday’s knowledge is often obsolete today, the volume of data available to us is more than ever. At the same time, the agility with which we make business sense of the same and use it proactively is critical. An individual, hence, will not be able to contribute much if he or she only knows few isolated truths and cannot understand their place in the larger context - Management cannot work in silos. A productive response time is only possible when one knows how to access the required knowledge, comprehend it and relate it to the problem at hand to further derive a solution.
2. **Challenging the established:** Renaissance in India also brought about several artistic and cultural developments but given the British rule in India and some existing customs such as dowry, caste system and sati (a ritual in which Hindu widows sacrificed themselves on top of their husbands’ funeral pyres); it also led to social and religious reforms. Led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ravindranath Tagore, scholars questioned prevailing practices and toiled to change the same in their communities. This journey from medievalism to modernity is also food for thought for organizations to look within, rethink their usual approaches and test their validity.

¹ The Frontiers of Management by Peter Drucker

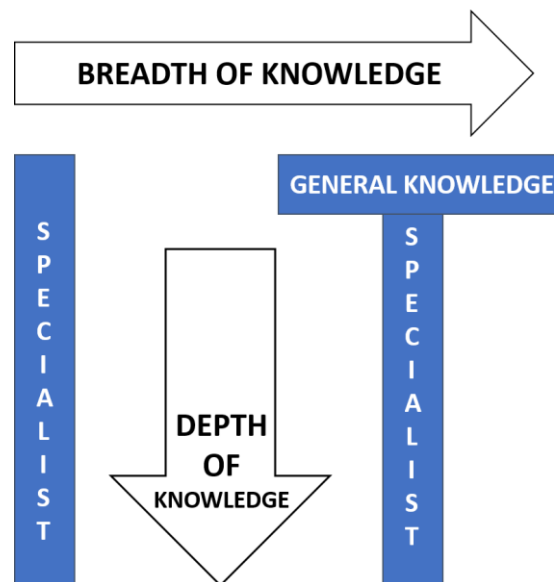
² The New Realities by Peter Drucker

³ Management Challenges of the 21st Century by Peter Drucker

3. **Competitive advantage:** Leonardo da Vinci, the personification of Renaissance man, was gifted and knowledgeable in many spheres. As Sigmund Freud quoted about him, he was “like a man who awoke too early in the darkness, while the others were all still asleep.” Being willing to learn regarding matters outside one’s scope will provide employees with competitive advantage over that workforce which does not venture outside its comfort zone.
4. **Facilitating Innovations:** Leonardo, apart from his contributions to art, also invented movable barricades’ system for Venice city’s protection; specifications for a primitive tank and a helicopter amongst other works as an engineer. The diverse knowledge of polymaths can help management come up with new ideas and explore the unknown to tackle complex challenges or to simply prepare for the future.

Given the advantages, one might be compelled to think that as much as possible, organizations should comprise of polymaths if not completely. But many fields such as medicine, software development or legal require high degree of specialization. Organizations need collaboration of both specialists and generalists to ensure that the specialized offering is superior as well as relevant to those who are not so proficient in the domain of specialization. The workmanship of specialists is essential, as long as it is related to the needs of the whole (business enterprise).⁴

The characteristics of specialists and polymaths are well described by the concept of “I” and “T” employee shapes. The “I” shape refers to the depth of one’s knowledge in a certain area whereas the vertical line in “T” also refers to the same but the horizontal line of “T” denotes to the individual’s broader general knowledge – effectively enhancing the T’s ability to collaborate with diverse range of people and also to contribute in a creative process.



⁴ Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices by Peter Drucker

As Andy Boynton writes⁵, the specialists might benefit by stepping one foot outside their small world. Looking at past experiences through a new lens, learning about a new field or simply drawing from every day occurrences can possibly help specialists find a new idea for their work. For “T”s or polymaths on the other hand, the progress forward can be to develop themselves to become “X” shaped – the kind of employee who not only has the necessary expertise but can also lead diverse teams (as denoted by the letter) to get the job done. Management also may initiate short immersion programs for employees to get them to learn a little more about each other’s work, to empathize better and view challenges from different perspectives. These stints can help specialists gain some of the broader knowledge they need to move to versatility. L’Oréal, for one, ensures that the newly joined sales officers and their managers mandatorily do an in-store promoter stint for first three to seven days on the job – preferably split between different channels (traditional mom & pop stores and modern trade).

The managers who recognize on which side of alphabets their teams fall on, understand their learning needs and facilitate relevant knowledge transfer will truly be Renaissance managers themselves. These managers will also be cognizant of the goal at hand and how to accomplish it better using the wide-ranging knowledge gained by their team. A Renaissance manager will personally exemplify the spirit of Renaissance but he/she also will inspire his/her team to inculcate the same.

For more and more leaders to become Renaissance manager, the reinforcement can start as early as during formal education. For most students, the custom is to take a single major for their studies and to excel in it. Arts, Science, Business Studies, Medicine or Law- students are expected to select one and follow it for years to come. Instead of this singular focus, they can be encouraged to join more flexible programs such as the Bachelor of Arts and Science, as opposed to Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science. Science can help provide the methodology required to test hypotheses and arriving at logical conclusions whereas Arts can teach one how to understand people, society, emotions and cultures. Similarly, renowned schools such as Harvard and Stanford offer joint programs in Business-Law and Science-Humanities respectively. Combining the two also improves employability quotient of the candidates.

It may not be always possible for all to go back to school but in the upcoming monthly meeting, Karnataka field team will definitely be doing the fun yet fruitful exercise of mapping themselves on I/T/X and identifying the specific topics outside their current awareness that can help them drive business better. It is a long journey but worth it for being able to learn the art of doing it all!

⁵ “Are you an ‘I’ or a ‘T’?” by Andy Boynton for www.Forbes.com