

# HRD

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“INCLUSION BRINGS VALUE, ENSURES ALL VOICES ARE HEARD AND OPENS UP A VARIETY OF PERSPECTIVES AND IDEAS FOR INNOVATIVE THINKING”

YASMEEN DIWAN SETH  
PEOPLE DIRECTOR  
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Explore the Potential of 4 Types of Generalists at Work  
Published by www.wiley.com*

# RISE OF THE GENERALISTS

Rapid advancements in Artificial Intelligence is reshaping the professional landscape, automating specialised tasks and altering the demand for different skillsets. Traditionally, the workforce has been divided between specialists - those who possess deep expertise in a narrow domain - and generalists, who have a broader skillset, often spanning multiple disciplines. For a long time, it has been the specialists that have been more valued, simply because of their deep technical knowledge. However, the emergence of AI is shifting the balance.

The World Economic Forum reports that 44 percent of workers' core skills will change by 2027, requiring adaptability more than deep expertise in a single area. Kodak engineers were among the best specialists in film technology, yet their deep expertise became irrelevant when digital cameras disrupted the market. Generalists, on the other hand, can pivot across industries and functions, making them more resilient to change. Research states that more than 70 percent of generalists excel in ambiguous situations and 32 percent of them cope well with high stress, making them invaluable in dynamic markets. In short, the multifaceted capabilities of generalists not only address current organisational challenges but also position companies for sustained success in an ever-changing business environment.

*AI automates specialised tasks:* For a long time, managers and leaders have been encouraged to specialise deeply in one area, believing that expertise in a single field would ensure career security. However, AI is fundamentally altering this equation by automating many of the tasks that previously required years of specialised training. This shift is making professionals with a broad skill set - who can connect ideas across disciplines - more valuable in organisations. Industries that once relied heavily on human specialists are now witnessing a transformation driven by AI-powered automation. For example, in the field of law, junior lawyers once spent long hours reviewing contracts and conducting case research. Now, AI tools can scan thousands of legal documents and extract key information in seconds. A legal professional who understands

business strategy, negotiation tactics and AI's role in risk assessment will bring more value than someone who only specialises in contract review. In medicine, a radiologist who only reads X-rays might find AI taking over much of their routine work, as AI can now analyse medical images faster and often more accurately than humans. However, a generalist doctor who understands AI's capabilities and can integrate it with patient care, considering ethical implications, bedside manner and holistic treatment approaches, becomes indispensable. Likewise, in terms of software development, coders who only focus on writing syntax-heavy code may find AI-driven tools like GitHub Copilot handling much of their work. However, a software engineer who can see the bigger picture - understanding business needs, user experience, cybersecurity and

AI-human collaboration - will be hard to replace. As AI becomes more proficient at executing specialised tasks, professionals who rely solely on deep expertise in narrow domains may find their roles diminishing. Instead, those who can integrate AI into their workflows, connect insights across different domains and creatively solve problems will stand out. With AI handling specialised, repetitive, or data-intensive tasks, the ability to think broadly and apply knowledge across different areas is becoming more important. Generalists, who often possess hybrid skill sets, such as combining business strategy with technical knowledge or blending psychology with data science, are uniquely positioned to thrive. Employers are increasingly seeking professionals who can use AI tools to enhance their productivity and decision-making. A marketing professional who understands AI-powered customer insights can craft highly targeted campaigns instead of just relying on intuition. A supply chain manager who leverages AI for demand forecasting can make smarter inventory decisions, avoiding shortages or overstock. Organisations are increasingly applying critical thinking and creativity to solve interdisciplinary problems. For example, a product manager who bridges engineering and customer experience can guide AI-driven product development while ensuring user needs remain central. So, in an AI-driven world, professionals who can think broadly, combine skills from multiple domains and collaborate across functions will be far more resilient and valuable than those who focus solely on deep specialisation.

*AI favours those who know how to connect the dots:* In an era where technological disruption is the norm, adaptability is a crucial trait for success. Generalists, who have experience across multiple domains, are better equipped to navigate the ever-changing demands of the AI-driven workforce. Many ground-breaking innovations occur at the intersection of different disciplines. AI can process vast

amounts of data and identify patterns, but it struggles with creative thinking and interdisciplinary problem-solving, two areas where generalists excel. Examples of cross-disciplinary innovation in everyday business settings include, in terms of marketing and data science fusion, a marketing manager with a background in psychology and data analytics can interpret customer behaviour beyond raw statistics, crafting emotionally resonant campaigns that drive engagement and sales. In terms of supply chain & AI integration, a supply chain professional with knowledge of machine learning can help optimise inventory forecasting, reducing waste

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and improving efficiency. Generalists have the ability to synthesise insights from different areas, connecting seemingly unrelated concepts to generate novel ideas. In the AI era, where machines handle routine tasks, the ability to think holistically and integrate diverse knowledge streams will become even more valuable. In fact, adaptability is a competitive advantage. AI is rapidly changing the nature of work, making static career paths obsolete. Generalists are inherently more adaptable than specialists because they are accustomed to learning new skills and pivoting between industries. When a consulting firm restructures its services due to AI automation, a consultant with a mix of strategy, analytics and communication skills can transition into a leadership role

in digital transformation. This is one of the ways how generalists gain a competitive edge in organisations. In terms of versatility, a project manager with experience in software development, operations and user experience can transition into a Chief of Staff role, bridging gaps between technical and business teams. An HR leader who understands organisational psychology and data analytics can drive AI-driven hiring strategies and workforce planning. In contrast, specialists who have spent decades mastering a narrow domain may struggle when AI disrupts their expertise, as retraining in an entirely new field can be daunting. Organisations are recognising this shift and are increasingly valuing employees who can wear multiple hats, making generalists more indispensable than ever.

*AI era requires generalist skills:* With AI transforming industries, leadership roles are evolving to require a broader skill set that encompasses strategy, technology and human dynamics. Generalists, who have experience across multiple disciplines, are uniquely suited to lead in this environment. It is imperative that there is a clear need for holistic decision-making. AI can provide data-driven insights, but leadership requires a combination of quantitative analysis and qualitative judgement. Effective leaders must understand AI's capabilities and limitations while integrating it into decision-making. A marketing director with experience in data analytics and consumer psychology can leverage AI-driven customer insights while recognising when human intuition is needed to craft compelling brand messaging. It is also important to balance technological advancements with ethical considerations and human-centric leadership. For instance, an HR leader with a background in psychology and technology can implement AI-driven recruitment tools while ensuring bias-free hiring practices and a positive candidate experience. Generalists, who can draw from diverse experiences, are well-equipped to make holistic decisions that account for technological, social

and economic factors. Systems thinking is one of the key skills of successful leaders in the age of AI. Understanding how different parts of an organisation interact and how AI fits into the bigger picture is a necessary skill. For example, a hospital administrator with experience in healthcare policy, IT and patient care can integrate AI-powered diagnostics in a way that benefits doctors, patients and insurance providers while ensuring regulatory compliance. Building relationships across technical and non-technical teams to foster collaboration is an area of improvement for a large number of small and large organisations. Interpersonal skills in terms of leadership skills can come here handy. For example, a general manager in a tech company who understands both software development and business strategy can bridge the gap between engineers and sales teams, ensuring AI products align with market needs and customer expectations. Generalists, who are comfortable operating across domains, are better suited to make complex decisions where no clear-cut answer exists. For example, AI can suggest financial investment strategies, but a generalist investor, who understands macroeconomics, consumer psychology and political risk, makes the final call. 45 percent of middle managers say AI cannot make contextual business decisions, reinforcing the need for generalists to interpret AI insights. Generalists excel in judgment-based roles, where human intuition, ethics and contextual awareness are key.

*Generalists as AI-augmented leaders:* The leadership landscape of 2025 is defined by a convergence of geopolitical shifts, technological evolution and changing workforce expectations. Leaders who proactively address these challenges with strategic adaptability, ethical considerations and a focus on engagement are poised to guide their organisations through this intricate environment. Unlike the Great Resignation of previous years, 2025 witnesses the Great Detachment, where employees remain in their positions but feel increasingly disconnected. This

disengagement threatens organisational performance, prompting leaders to implement strategies that re-engage employees and rebuild commitment. A major current trend in the space of AI is the influence and impact of AI Agents. As AI agents become more sophisticated, the debate between specialists and generalists in the workforce will become more popular. While AI is automating many specialised tasks, it is simultaneously amplifying the value

*“AI CAN PROCESS VAST AMOUNTS OF DATA AND IDENTIFY PATTERNS, BUT IT STRUGGLES WITH CREATIVE THINKING AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PROBLEM-SOLVING, TWO AREAS WHERE GENERALISTS EXCEL”*

of generalists who can integrate AI into decision-making, strategy and innovation. AI requires human judgment in ambiguous situations, as AI is data-driven but lacks human judgment in uncertain, ambiguous, or high-stakes situations. Moreover, the rise of freelancing, gig work and portfolio careers is making the traditional ‘one-specialty-for-life’ career path obsolete. Portfolio careers favour generalists. By 2040, it’s estimated that half of the U.S. workforce will be freelancers, requiring the ability to wear multiple hats and work across disciplines. Generalists thrive in the gig economy because they can switch between roles, industries and opportunities. The new world of work doesn’t reward knowing everything about one thing, it rewards knowing a lot about many things and how to connect them. As organisations increasingly adopt AI, they require leaders who can bridge the gap between technological advancements and human-centred decision-making. Generalists, with their ability to see the big picture

and integrate diverse knowledge areas, are well-positioned to fill these roles. Here, trust takes the centre seat. In an era of information overload and scepticism, building and maintaining trust is paramount. Leaders must articulate clear values, demonstrate accountability and foster authentic connections within their organisations and with the public to navigate the complexities of 2025 successfully. Leaders in the AI era need to be AI-augmented generalists, professionals who can leverage AI while maintaining a broad perspective on business strategy, workforce dynamics and emerging technologies. One of the main characteristics of successful leaders in this new landscape is curiosity and lifelong learning. Staying updated on AI trends and continuously expanding their knowledge base is a need more than want. A CFO who actively learns about machine learning applications in finance can better assess risk models, fraud detection and financial forecasting tools, giving their company a competitive edge. *AI boom and the growing importance of generalists:* The rise of AI is redefining the value of generalists in the workforce. As AI automates specialised tasks, professionals with broad skill sets and cross-disciplinary thinking are becoming increasingly valuable. Generalists excel at integrating knowledge from different fields, driving innovation and adapting to rapid change, qualities that are essential in an AI-driven world. For professionals looking to stay relevant, embracing a generalist mindset, cultivating adaptability, continuous learning and interdisciplinary expertise can be the key to success in an AI-driven world. Organisations, too, must recognise the growing importance of generalists and rethink their hiring, training and leadership development strategies accordingly. In the age of AI, the future belongs less to those who specialise, but to those who can connect, adapt and lead across disciplines - the generalists!