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The Gifts of Breadth

Insights from Leaders with Non-Linear Careers

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Our age reveres the specialist, but humans are natural polymaths, at our best, when we turn our minds to many things.

British poet, writer, and explorer Robert Twigger

INTRODUCTION: THE ERA OF SPECIALISTS

As consumers and citizens, we tend to place ourselves in the hands of technical experts. We all want to hear that our pilot has flown thousands of hours, our surgeon has performed hundreds of similar operations, and our architect has designed lots of beautiful buildings. In his best-selling book *Outliers* Malcolm Gladwell popularized the “10,000 hour rule,” which sees obsessive, linear focus as a means to realizing your potential. He illustrated “the idea that excellence at performing a complex task requires a minimum level of practice surfaces again and again in studies of expertise,” citing examples of world-class experts such as chess phenomenon Bobby Fischer and master pianist Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Gladwell, 2008).

This all makes perfect sense when we are talking about specialist roles like a pilot, surgeon, chess player, and pianist. But, in recent years, our obsession with depth has gone well beyond that. It has become the central premise for how we organize our society and the most significant sectors within it—governments, businesses, and non-profit organizations. We label and celebrate the best in each sector as a “policy wonk,” “business tycoon,” or “miracle worker,” respectively—implicitly eschewing recognition of broad, non-linear experiences. The terms “polymath” and “Renaissance man” or “Renaissance woman”—references from the 15th century to people whose expertise spans a

significant number of different subject areas—are vestiges of a bygone age. As we have entered the 21st century, we have been led to believe that the route to professional excellence and success, and thus to personal fulfillment and happiness, is through deep specialization and focused preparation.

This route now starts at school. Thus, in the US, there are a number of recently established high schools that focus intensively on “STEM” education—science, technology, engineering, and math. In the UK, students aged 15 are recommended to choose just three or four subjects to study at A-level prior to university—a decision that will direct the course of their future studies and career options. We see a similar trend in the narrowing of post-secondary education, with the percentage of humanities majors in US universities now hovering around 7 percent (half the already modest 14 percent share in 1970) and the number of liberal arts colleges on the decline—to 130 colleges today from 212 colleges in 1990—a 39 percent drop (Brooks, 2013). We are increasingly viewing educational attainment as a vocational training exercise, which reduces a population’s dynamism and ability to innovate (Phelps, 2013). This kind of pressure carries over from school right into the job market. One student pursuing a dual-graduate degree in business and public policy told us he “can’t get a job in the public or private sector” because employers question his motive for pursuing the “other sector’s” degree. As a result, many of us have adjusted our resumes to appear as specialists in our professional careers.

Our research, however, suggests that there is much to say in favor of breadth instead of excessive specialization. Based on interviews with leaders who have rejected the pressure to specialize in one area, and instead have gone on to lead institutions in multiple sectors and address some of the world’s most complex challenges, this chapter argues that people who deliberately seek out a diversity of broad, non-linear experiences throughout their careers might be better suited to solve the most complex challenges facing their personal lives, their organizations, and society as a whole.

In what follows we first examine the consequences of too much depth, especially with respect to the 2008 financial crisis. We then illustrate how the highest priority challenges facing society are wide-ranging and multi-faceted, and assert that leaders who are equally broad—individually having a wide array of experiences across multiple sectors, disciplines, cultures, functions, and issues—are better suited to address these kinds of complex challenges. We then explain in some more detail our research methodology, which primarily involved interviewing over 150 broad leaders based in the United States, Canada, and Hong Kong to identify their repertoire of skills, tools, and mindsets. This research revealed six important traits of leaders who have successfully “gone broad”—intellectual thread, transferable skills, integrated networks, contextual intelligence, balanced motivations, and prepared mind—each of which we discuss and illustrate with select examples. We close the

chapter by providing guidance to individuals on developing the six distinguishing traits of broad leadership, and a call to action for leaders in business, government, non-profits, and higher education to embed non-linear career development within their people development and engagement policies.

DEPTH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The result of the pressure to specialize in education and work is clear: future leaders are incentivized to focus their development in niche areas, and established leaders most often have only their own sectors to draw meaningful insight from—at great cost to all. The near collapse of the world’s financial system in 2008 and 2009 is a profound example of a system designed, operated, and nearly destroyed by the provision of almost unfettered authority to deep specialists. They typically spoke in an industry-specific language that few could understand, using words and especially acronyms known only to each other. Year after year, they applied their expertise and technology to develop more and more sophisticated, complex, and opaque financial products. The gap between what they did and what the rest of us understood inexorably widened.

As the financial crisis unfolded, however, it became painfully apparent that these deep specialists lacked the breadth of experience and perspective to address crucial blind spots in the financial system—like what would happen when lots of people have taken out mortgages they cannot afford; when you package these mortgages in derivatives that nobody understands; and when financial contagion spreads to countries that are already massively exposed by their own financial profligacy and ill discipline. Making those kinds of broad judgments was not their job. However, the critical issue is that there were too few people within the financial system with the breadth of experience and perspective to understand the interlocking roles that homebuyers, selling agents, investment banks, financial literacy educators, credit unions, credit agencies, pension funds, legislators, regulators, central banks, and other actors play in the mortgage system—globally, nationally, and locally. There was nobody with the breadth of intellectual disciplines to assess the economics, mathematics, finance, history, sociology, and psychology of borrowing and asset bubbles.

The 2008–9 financial crisis was not the first time our faith in deep specialists having the right answers proved flawed. Beginning in the 1980s, University of Pennsylvania professor Philip Tetlock sought to analyze the accuracy of forecasts by both experts in their fields, and non-experts (Tetlock, 2005). For his study, he picked an area that, similar to the financial markets, was rife with uncertainty: geopolitical outcomes. Tetlock tracked 80,000+ predictions made

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by 284 professional forecasters in various complex political scenarios both within and outside of their areas of expertise, and found that non-experts were actually the most accurate at making predictions. Based on this research he found that

what experts think matters far less than how they think. If we want realistic odds on what will happen next, we are better off turning to those who “know many little things”: individuals who draw from an eclectic array of traditions and accept ambiguity and contradiction as inevitable features of life—than those who “know one big thing”: people who toil devotedly within one tradition, and reach for formulaic solutions to ill-defined problems.

In today’s world nothing is simple, linear, and one-dimensional, however clear-cut experts can make issues appear. Instead, the highest priority “wicked problems” facing leaders and society today are wide-ranging multi-faceted, and complex, with various stakeholders who hold contrasting views on cause and effect, and even greater disagreements about alternative solutions. The list of issues is as long as it is profound: health-care quality and affordability, access to education, food security and safety, energy security, climate change, and sustainable economic growth and employment. Addressing these challenges requires meaningful collaboration and collective action because no single individual, organization, or sector has the ability to resolve these issues in isolation.

Deep-seated and overly confident experts display traits detrimental to the process of making accurate predictions: they underestimate the complexity of the world, are less open to different opinions after their own mind is made up, dislike questions that could be answered in several ways, make decisions quickly and confidently, are less able to understand how the opposing side’s viewpoint could be right, and prefer to interact with people whose opinions are not very different to their own (Tetlock, 2005). In a more recent study, he and other colleagues found that expertise is not all bad all the time, however. Good predictors often have a relevant level of “domain knowledge”—diverse pockets of applicable content knowledge (Mellers et al., 2015). Having both breadth and depth allows leaders to avoid the common pitfalls associated with just depth.

RESEARCHING BROAD LEADERS

The first question to ask is why an individual needs to appreciate and understand all these areas—is that not what having a diverse team is for? While collective diversity—drawing together many people with different backgrounds, experience, and skills—is better than no diversity, what we are

talking about is different. Broad leaders have what we call inner breadth. Psychological and organizational research show that people with this kind of inner breadth can be more effective than non-diverse leaders in various critical ways. They are generative of new ideas and inventions (Boh et al., 2014); central in key decision-making (Bunderson, 2003); connected to a larger and diverse network (Cannella et al., 2008); able to overcome communication barriers within a team setting (Bunderson and Sutcliffe, 2002); better and faster learners (Dries et al., 2012); and, for those seeking upward movement, likely to be promoted (Campion et al., 1994). It follows then that individuals (and organizations) who reject the supposed primacy of specialism, and instead embrace breadth, will be best equipped to more effectively tackle the complex and pressing challenges facing them.

For our study we defined “non-linear” or “broad,” at the outset, as being based on sectors, i.e., leaders who are able and experienced in the business, non-profit, and government sectors. Based on this definition, we identified 150 broad leaders to interview, who had worked as senior executives or representatives in their organizations (so as to ensure our subjects had amassed enough breadth to reflect on their experiences); and had worked full or part time in each of the business, government, and non-profit (including university) sectors. The typical subject would have worked full time in and transitioned often between two sectors (usually business and government) and worked part time in the third sector (usually non-profit). Of the 150 leaders we interviewed, 60 were based in the United States, 70 in Canada, and 15 in Hong Kong and 5 in other countries (Singapore, Russia, and the United Kingdom). They include leaders such as Jarrett Barrios, CEO of the American Red Cross, Los Angeles; Doug Black, Senator of Canada; Carol Browner, Senior Counselor at Albright Stonebridge Group; Bernard Chan, President of Asia Financial Holdings; Naheed Nenshi, Mayor of the City of Calgary; Jeff Seabright, Chief Sustainability Officer of Unilever; Stacey Stewart, US President of the United Way; Michael Wilson, Chairman of Barclays Canada; and Rosanna Wong, Executive Director of the Hong Kong Youth Federation.

To identify their repertoire of skills, tools, and mindsets, we conducted 60- to 90-minute interviews (on average) in a semi-structured format using a pre-defined list of questions. We asked them to: (1) narrate their overall education and career experiences with special attention paid to when and why they made transitions; (2) explain what unique skills and resources they accumulated in each context and transferred to new contexts; (3) identify examples of impact attributable to their broad experiences and resources; (4) reflect on lessons they have learned while building a non-linear career and advice they would give to someone pursuing one; and (5) examine the relevance of broad experience in the context of current and future challenges faced by organizations and society. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Insights were derived through a combination of reading transcripts, detailed interview coding/analysis, and research team discussions/problem solving.

On a more general level, our research has revealed that in addition to sector breadth, many of the leaders interviewed displayed one or several additional dimensions of breadth: (i) intellectual breadth, i.e., an understanding of multiple fields of knowledge such as arts, sciences, engineering, business, and law; (ii) cultural breadth, i.e., a nuanced understanding of how different geographies and cultures impact the issue at hand; (iii) functional breadth, i.e., a knowledge of how different functions can inform and work together, such as finance, human resources, and operations; and (iv) industry breadth, i.e., an appreciation of the interactions between different industries, such as the food, water, and energy nexus.

More specifically, our research, combined with our own personal experiences as broad leaders spanning multiple generations, as well as insights of psychological and organizational research, allowed us to identify six important traits of leaders who have successfully “gone broad.” You might call them the Broad Leader’s DNA—a common set of attributes that, together, create a compelling language and value proposition for how diverse experiences combine to form a leadership strength, not deficit. For each of these six distinguishing traits of broad leaders we then examined (i) its benefits and relevancy, (ii) the experiences that support its development, and (iii) its associated challenges and risks.

To validate our initial findings we conducted a review of the popular literature as well as the relevant academic literature, with the latter turning out to be rather tangential—most probably because the notion of building cross-sector careers has been relatively unexplored by academics. On the whole, we found sufficient support for our findings and refined/nuanced them when discovering additional and alternative evidence. In the following, we will present the six traits identified and illustrate them with select examples from our broad leaders.

THE SIX DISTINGUISHING TRAITS OF BROAD LEADERS

Intellectual Thread

This means the individual has subject-matter expertise on a particular issue informed by perspectives and knowledge across the dimensions of breadth. Having breadth is only as good as your ability to apply the resulting insights and skills in impactful ways—which can be particularly acute when oriented around a particular issue of focus. In a sense, this is where depth meets breadth, in that you need to go deep on something in order to leverage your

breadth most effectively. The most effective broad leader, therefore, is not one who is a “jack-of-all-trades, master of none,” but rather one that is a “jack-of-all-trades, master of one” (or some)! They develop a “T”-shaped profile—knowing a little about a lot of things (the horizontal bar), and a lot about one thing (the vertical “I”). That one particular thing is what we call the broad leader’s “intellectual thread,” which they develop by studying and acting on a particular issue or theme over time from multiple perspectives, building subject-matter expertise in the process. Developing and applying an intellectual thread gives broad leaders the capacity to “get on the balcony” to see the bigger picture and transcend some of the constraints that narrow leaders face when dealing with complex issues (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997).

Carol Browner, a broad leader and pioneer of the environmental movement for nearly 30 years, has environmental sustainability as her intellectual thread. She developed her expertise while serving in the grassroots lobbying group Citizen Action, as then-senator Al Gore’s legislative director, as the head of Florida’s Department of Environmental Regulation, as the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency under President Clinton, as a partner in the Albright Stonebridge consultancy, and finally as President Obama’s assistant for energy and climate change policy. “I have this interesting experience of having advocated for legislation as a non-profit leader, having developed legislation as a congressional staffer, having implemented those same laws while in the executive branch of government, and now having advised business on how the laws impact their strategies. Experiencing each side has given me a deep and holistic understanding of how each sector approaches the challenges they face,” Carol told us.

In her most recent posting with the Obama Administration, Carol applied her intellectual thread in 2009 to bring together three government entities—the state of California, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the US Department of Transportation, ten automobile companies, including Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors, and several non-profit actors, including the United Auto Workers and leaders in the environmental community, to agree on a new national policy for fuel efficiency standards and greenhouse gas emissions for all new cars and trucks sold in the United States.

Carol reflects that, by virtue of her intellectual thread, she knew exactly what the private sector automobile companies could live with and without—and created a policy that worked for both the private and public sectors: “A clear and uniform national policy is not only good news for consumers who will save money at the pump, but this policy is also good news for the auto industry which will no longer be subject to a costly patchwork of differing rules and regulations.” The Obama Administration estimated the resulting standards will save 1.8 billion barrels of oil over the life of the program and eliminate approximately 900 million metric tons in greenhouse gas emissions (Environmental Protection Agency, 2009).

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Many people will not know their intellectual thread yet—and that can be a good enough reason to stick with what they know and keep doing what they are currently doing. But we think the opposite is true—when you do not know what you want, go broad and increase your chances of discovering the area you want to focus on in life.

Transferable Skills

This refers to the individual learning skills and capabilities that are unique to each dimension of breadth, and applying those that are transferable across contexts. The concept of president of the United States as “CEO” attracted significant attention in the 2012 presidential election campaign as a key feature of Mitt Romney’s candidacy. Given his unquestionable success in business as CEO of private equity firm Bain Capital, the Republican nominee suggested that he could apply his management skills to “fix” the US government.

This general line of reasoning is not new; both government and non-profit organizations are often under pressure to run more like a business—efficient, strategic, performance-driven, you name it. That concept, however, risks missing the richness of broad leadership. Successful leaders do not simply apply models blindly from one context to another; rather, they accrue building blocks from each sector and experience, drawing upon them equally in order to build a successful, non-linear career and have impact. As a consequence, business has just as much to learn from the government and non-profit sectors as the other way around. This sentiment is reflected with the inclusion of “transferable skills” as a trait of successful broad leaders.

The broad leaders we have interviewed have found that mixing naturally developed and best-in-class skills from business, government, and non-profits yields an impressive and unique array of skills. As far as sectors go, business executives excel at allocating scarce resources to quickly capture attractive market opportunities. Non-profit leaders typically focus their more limited resources on advocating for marginalized persons, and devise creative ways to further the environmental and social good. Government officials bring competing interests together to create legal, policy, and incentive frameworks for the benefit of the general public. Similarly, the mindset and skills that studying many disciplines, such as the social sciences, creative arts, economics, and law impart can be remarkably inventive when transferred into new arenas—such as the flourishing application of design thinking to business issues like improving store layouts, operational processes, and customer service.

Hong Kong-based Dr Rosanna Wong is another great example of a broad leader who has acquired a variety of transferrable skills while working in the non-profit sector as Executive Director of the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups; serving on Hong Kong’s Legislative and Executive Councils (part-time

political roles); acting as a board member and advisor to HSBC, CK Hutchison Holdings Limited, Hutchison Telecom, and Mars; and earning graduate degrees in sociology, social policy and planning, and the arts. Rosanna brings a very unique perspective to her colleagues as the only non-business member of her corporate boards:

I try to focus on long-term sustainability, culture and values—such as honesty and integrity. I feel my role is to be a reminder that money is not just spent on corporate responsibility, but also investments in helping nurture the right behaviors to create a people-centric culture. Perhaps this is because of my training as a sociologist, which helps me to look at how people mix together. I believe that how people work together is important to ensure higher efficiency delivery. In the end, it's all about people.

And the transfer certainly goes both ways:

People in the business sector have a different perspective and I learned a lot from them about how to run a better, more effective and efficient NGO. I now look not only at risk management, but also at strategic and financial planning, as well as performance scores to make sure that our clients and those that we serve get the best out of us.

The government sector has a lot of relevant skills as well, as Coca-Cola found when it hired Jeff Seabright in the early 2000s. The company hired him to resolve its emerging water security crises in India, Mexico, and Thailand where its bottling plants were being forced to shut down due to excessive water consumption and poor environmental practices. Although Jeff had briefly worked as vice president for policy planning at Texaco, he was a relative newcomer to the private sector, having had extensive political and diplomatic experience with the Foreign Service, the US Senate, USAID, and President Clinton's White House Task Force on Climate Change.

To make a concrete business case for water conservation, Jeff drew upon analytical methodologies from his environmental work in the government and non-profit sectors and commissioned a geographic information system map. It showed that 39 percent of Coca-Cola's plants were located in the world's most water-stressed areas—precisely the places where the company expected the bulk of future growth and margins. This was the first time that the company's senior leaders had seen such a thorough and disciplined piece of work on the natural resources consumed by their business. It persuaded them to give Jeff a budget for several water-sustainability initiatives resulting in Coca-Cola reducing the amount of water required to produce their products by a third, and meeting their 2020 target for 100 percent water replenishment by 2015—5 years ahead of schedule.

Developing transferable skills requires you to first account for the core skills you currently have, and identify ways to adapt (and not blindly adopt) them to new environments. It is one of the most effective ways to show immediate value in new environments.

Integrated Network

This refers to the individual leveraging diverse networks to advance one's career and knowledge base, build top leadership teams, and convene decision makers for impact. When we asked our interview subjects, "How did you end up crossing so many boundaries in your career—and what triggered your interest?" our respondents most commonly told us that a mentor, colleague, or friend pulled them into their newest position. Networks can be essential for any career; however, it is hard enough moving around in your own sector, discipline, or country—imagine how much harder it is when you want to significantly cross domains. Because hiring managers so rarely look outside their established sources of talent, having a diverse integrated network is even more vital to building a non-linear career—and experiencing its benefits.

Broad leaders depend on their integrated network to do more than just advance their careers, however; they help broad leaders expand their knowledge and diversify their perspectives, helping them take more creative approaches to life and work. By drawing from insights of their peers in other domains of work, broad leaders are able to gather information and tactics to problem solving that are typically inaccessible to their more specialized colleagues. At their most impactful level, the networks of broad leaders can also be employed to address and resolve tricky and complex issues facing society.

In 2010, IBM was having difficulty hiring qualified candidates for open positions despite high rates of unemployment and millions of people out of work across the US. Stan Litow, IBM's Vice President of Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs, recognized the skills mismatch in the labor market for information technology companies and drew from his network to craft an innovative solution. Stan worked across sectors to create the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH), a network of grades 9–14 schools with a rigorous academic program designed to equip students with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree in college along with the skills needed to compete for high-growth technology jobs (see also Chapter 20, this volume). He leveraged his broad expertise and contacts, coupled with his networks that included Chancellor Joel Klein at the New York City Department of Education, and Chancellor Matt Goldstein at City University of New York. Stan told us:

I had a longstanding personal relationship with the City University of New York chancellor. IBM's former CEO Sam Palmisano had a similar relationship with former New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg. Both were essential in getting us over difficult challenges. And because I had previously been deputy chancellor of the City of New York Department of Education, I had deep content knowledge and credibility with Chancellor Joel Klein and both educators and political leaders, and knew the school system and its structure first hand.

The expertise, funding, prestige, and other resources of Stan’s network provided legitimacy for the project during its initial phases. The collaboration resulted in the establishment and implementation of P-TECH, now serving over 500 students in its fifth year of operations. Over half of P-TECH’s students have exceeded New York state high school graduation requirements in three years or less. The program’s results are so compelling that President Obama, after a visit to P-TECH with IBM CEO Ginni Rometty, featured P-TECH in the 2013 State of the Union address and announced a \$100 million grant program to foster high school redesign along the lines of P-TECH. Later that year, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announced 16 winners of a statewide competition to implement the P-TECH model. By the fall of 2016, there will be 60 P-TECH schools in six states, with 200 different industry partners, offering a range of technical degrees in areas like advanced manufacturing and health information technology.

Few of us have networks like Stan, but we all can develop an integrated network with sincere effort and time. To ensure you are building the right kind of network, focus on diversity and filling gaps across sectors, intellectual disciplines, cultures, functions, and industries.

Contextual Intelligence

This refers to the leader’s understanding of the fundamental (and nuanced) similarities and differences between varying sector contexts, and their ability to fluently exercise empathy and leadership throughout. In his book *The Powers to Lead* Joseph Nye explores why some leaders succeed in one context and fail in another, noting that “many leaders have a fixed repertoire of skills, which limits and conditions their responses to new situations” (Nye, 2008). We have found that broad leaders meanwhile are adept at avoiding this limitation: they are able to adapt and adjust to changing circumstances and scenarios, and especially capable of adjusting their leadership style to the motivations, culture and language, performance measures, and decision-making processes of their organizational and cultural context. We call this ability “contextual intelligence.”

This trait becomes particularly relevant when addressing complex cross-sector and cross-disciplinary challenges. It helps to intuitively appreciate the deep-rooted perspective of each partner at the table, and know what to say and do to maintain the collaboration’s level of performance—not to mention your own performance, too. Underlying contextual intelligence is a seasoned emotional intelligence—the capacity for self-awareness, social-awareness, and, most fundamentally, empathy (Goleman, 2006). Some of these attributes are learned organically—pursuing broad roles and activities will naturally help you to refine the elements of your emotional intelligence, while others require deliberate attention to personal development. It is no wonder why so many professional vocations—lawyers, consultants, journalists, advisors, and bankers—feature often among the resumes of broad

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leaders. These jobs require an ability to operate effectively in different sectors, industries, geographies, and on multiple issues. Broad leaders need to demonstrate contextual intelligence in each new scenario, and especially during times of crisis when cross-sector collaboration is often necessary to resolve the problem.

When Coca-Cola was going through its water security crisis in 2001, Jeff elected to frame the issue not as an environmental risk, but rather as strategic, financial, and operational risks. He highlighted how the company's highest growth and margin plants were also located in the most water insecure areas, and therefore at risk of interrupted production. Furthermore, Jeff knew that Coca-Cola's success derived greatly from its marketing and brand value, and therefore used language that highlighted the emerging reputational risk of its water crisis in India.

Turning it from a technical, environmental challenge into a marketing and reputational issue helped to show the issue's importance. I distilled my findings into a short, bumper sticker-type pitch, which used compelling graphics and company-friendly language that centered upon the risk to our brand if we did not deal with the challenge immediately.

In implementing his change and cross-sector partnership agenda, he also grounded communication in the incentives that each sector responded to (Coca-Cola's bottom-line requirements, the non-profits' sustainability mission, the needs of USAID's constituents), leveraged knowledge of USAID's bureaucracy to determine which specific departments to partner with, and onboarded partners based on what benefits each organization could bring to the effort. The World Wildlife Fund, for example, had watershed expertise that Coca-Cola needed.

Jeff used his contextual intelligence by asking himself: Do I understand their needs and priorities? How am I being heard by my audience? Am I framing my point of view in terms and language that will resonate with them? On the face of it, this seems a fairly clear and straightforward method to influencing. Yet, it is notable how many new joiners fail to follow this kind of a structured approach to their new environment, often because they let biases—such as “business is fast-moving, cut-throat, and all about making money”; or “government is slow-moving, bureaucratic and lazy”; or “non-profits are idealistic, under-resourced and impractical”—get in the way. Overcoming such biases may be hard, but it is essential to building a non-linear career.

Balanced Motivations

This refers to individuals having to balance and reconcile several competing motivations, such as creating wealth, doing good, driving change, having influence, and improving themselves by crossing boundaries and ensuring they are creating

public value. Broad leaders rely on their core values and deep motivations to guide their path to personal and professional breadth. They each carry with them strong “career anchors”—a term popularized by MIT’s Edgar Schein to describe core motivations and values that guide career choices. Like many of us, however, broad leaders are motivated by many different things at once. Typically, they maintain a desire to create wealth for themselves and society; serve the needs of the vulnerable and the environment; seek power to have significant impact on key decisions; improve their skills, leadership, and personal lives; and drive change and advance progress. Not every motivation can or will be primary; in fact, some secondary motivations—the “means”—serve to enable a primary motivation—the “end.” One broad leader told us she seeks power in order to drive change, and drives change in order to create wealth, while others had their own unique order to how their motivations interact and support one another.

The challenge is that few roles or organizations will satisfy all of these varied motivations simultaneously—especially given each sector operates with a different purpose and set of motivations. Wealth creation, for example, is strongly associated with work in the private sector, and even with certain industries within the business world. Others—like having the power to influence and lead large-scale change—are most associated with government. The non-profit sector, meanwhile, is typically most associated with helping vulnerable populations and/or protecting the environment.

As a consequence, broad leaders struggle to pursue all of these motives simultaneously; they necessarily have to make tradeoffs between them at any given time. Furthermore, sometimes several motivations are in direct conflict with each other, creating ethical and moral dilemmas in the process. That is where the most underlying motivation of broad leaders kicks in: their desire to create “public value,” as noted by Joseph Nye. He explained to us in an interview: “It can happen in whatever sector they are working in. They carry that sense between the sectors.” The desire and resolve of broad leaders to satisfy their varied motivations and create public value over time defines the fifth trait: balanced motivations.

Michael Wilson is someone who has developed and acted on his balanced motivations, and has made several significant career changes in order to do so. Hailing from Canada, he has focused on economic growth and competitiveness throughout his career, serving as chairman of both UBS and Barclays Capital’s Canadian operations, and minister of finance and Canadian ambassador to the United States. Michael’s catalysts for taking a non-linear career path were personal, especially when it came to involvement in the non-profit sector. Michael lost two high school friends to cancer in his early 20s—leading him to canvass in Toronto for the Cancer Society and take on increasing roles of responsibility as they required. More tragic still, he lost his eldest son to depression and suicide almost 20 years ago—leading Michael to devote

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much of his time to chairing mental health research, treatment, and fundraising initiatives in Canada:

Even before our son died, I felt this area needed more attention. There are still challenges of stigma, and there are funding challenges. When you look at the burden of illness in a country, you automatically think of cancer and heart disease, but rarely of mental illness. There's a very high incidence of it—higher than people realize—and there's an ongoing cost to families and community.

Achieving all the aspirations within professional and personal well-being also requires broad leaders to develop clear personal priorities and a strong moral compass for when ethical or moral dilemmas arise—like Jeff Seabright faced while evaluating an offer to join oil company Texaco's global public policy team from the White House on the Task Force for Climate Change. Jeff was intrigued, but taking the job seemed implausible at first. On top of his lack of private sector experience, Jeff had come to think of the oil majors like Texaco as the “bad guys, the climate change deniers.” Texaco after all was a member of the Global Climate Coalition (GCC), a lobbying group opposed to government regulation on climate change issues. So Jeff set a condition to Texaco's chairman Peter Bijur—he would join them if the company left the GCC, which would make it the first major US oil company to do so. When Peter agreed, Jeff felt compelled to accept his offer—having been convinced that he could do more to further his environmental concerns by joining the company than by remaining in government. “I took a lot of crap from my NGO friends for ‘selling out,’” he recalls, “but within the first two weeks I was working on putting millions of dollars into efficient infrastructure to address energy challenges—and having much more impact. Did I really sell out, or was I moving up?”

So how do you deal with the choices available to you over the course of your path to breadth? The answer is that you find a way to understand, evaluate, and reconcile your own motives—to develop a “motivation map.” In constructing this map, you will put comparative weights on the various motivations you have—determining which matters most to you and charting a course that reflects this weighting. Developing and navigating this motivation map will be the work of a lifetime, however, for the simple reason that your motivations will change as your circumstances change.

Prepared Mind

This means the individual exhibits a willingness to follow her curiosity and take the “road less traveled,” welcoming the accompanying financial and career risks along the way. In all our interviews, we asked the question: “Did you set out to be a broad leader, or did it just happen?” In almost every case,

the answer was “it just happened.” After a while, we grew suspicious that so many non-linear careers had been based exclusively on serendipity. But then we were reminded by Bob Hormats—an accomplished leader in both business and government and the current vice chairman of Kissinger Associates—of Louis Pasteur’s famous saying, “In the fields of observation, chance favors only the prepared mind.” Bob explained that “Even though you don’t know what’s going to happen, you should be prepared to take advantage of any opportunity that might occur.” It is then we realized what so many broad leaders have in common—a “prepared mind.”

It describes broad leaders’ curious—almost instinctual—ability to take advantage of opportunities from across the dimensions of breadth. It is by no means a structured and deterministic life plan, but rather a deep intellectual curiosity that leads you to undiscovered territory, a certain readiness to seek (and take) the road less travelled in life and career, and the mental fortitude for the inevitable career risks that ensue. Broad leaders reject the premise that breadth is “too hard” in the first place, believing instead they cannot afford not to take on the challenges and risks that come with tying together multiple areas of interest—even without clear foresight into how it will all successfully fuse over time. This is not to say that building a broad life and non-linear career does not require any thought and direction setting, however. Amongst other things, it requires some personal financial planning so that you are almost certainly able to say “yes” no matter which unique opportunities arise.

“Chance favors only the prepared mind.” Think of that in the context of the story that Steve Jobs told in his 2005 Stanford University commencement address. He recounted how, at the age of 17, he dropped out of Reed College after 6 months, but stayed around as a drop-in for another 18 months before he “really quit.” He added: “The minute I dropped out I could stop taking the required classes that didn’t interest me, and begin dropping in on the ones that looked interesting...And much of what I stumbled into by following my curiosity and intuition turned out to be priceless later on.” One of those classes was in calligraphy.

Reed College at the time offered perhaps the best calligraphy instruction in the country. Throughout the campus, every poster, every label on every drawer, was beautifully hand calligraphed...I decided to take a calligraphy class to learn how to do this. I learned about sans serif typefaces, about the varying amount of space between different letter combinations. It was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can’t capture, and I found it fascinating.

He did not think that any of this would have practical application, until ten years later, when he was designing the first Macintosh computer. “We designed it all into the Mac. It was the first computer with beautiful typography.” He reflected: “If I had never dropped in on that calligraphy class, the

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Mac would never have had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it's likely that no personal computer would have them." Jobs never used the phrase "prepared mind" in this or any other address. But it was implied in what he said next: "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them going backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." That mindset, in many ways, is what prepared mind is all about.

Take the case of Jarrett Barrios as well, who started his career as a corporate services lawyer, became the first Latino and openly gay man elected to the Massachusetts State Legislature, served as president of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation (GLAAD), and is now CEO of the American Red Cross Los Angeles Region. Jarrett was forced to "shamefully defend himself for not choosing a major in college." He instead chose to study a mix of anthropology, economics, and jurisprudence. Shortly thereafter, his post-secondary experience was supplemented by legal studies from a school that, notably, did not rank as highly as others he had been accepted into—but that had a reputation for taking a particularly multi-disciplinary approach to the pedagogy of law. His path upon graduation, into a corporate law firm, appeared unusual to his peers who similarly sought to participate in public life at a senior level in the future. While his classmates entered the public service directly, Jarrett's path appeared to be the slower route.

My colleagues were 'ahead' of me in their pursuit of a senior governmental position for a few years after graduation. But 10 years later, when I was an elected representative and they were still making their way up the ladder in the public service, they looked up and said 'what did he know that I didn't?'

Having a prepared mind is a critical aspect to going broad—indeed, it is the one and only trait that gives you the confidence to take such unconventional risks in the first place. If it does not come naturally, it can be developed through forceful thinking and taking "small steps" as you traverse the dimensions of breadth. Critically, a prepared mind is not a one-time thing—it is a personal and professional journey. Few of us retain the exact same interests and objectives throughout our lives—we evolve. The question is, will they evolve to broaden or deepen our options, to encompass a wider or narrower range of interests and opportunities?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

It is inspiring to meet exceptional people who are building brilliant careers dedicated to addressing some of society's most pressing problems. But the

leaders you have read about here are the exception to the rule. Society reveres specialists—figures of authority and expertise. But single-sector specialism has its drawbacks and should not be the path for future aspiring leaders. Instead, we need more future leaders to be broad—good at many things, and able to engage and collaborate with diverse stakeholders by drawing from multiple sectors, intellectual disciplines, cultures, functions, and industries.

Many readers may find that the individuals above are intimidating—perhaps impossible—persons to emulate. You may shudder that, in today’s world, it is not that easy to be broad and effective. But going broad effectively is not as difficult and far away as you might think if you hone and apply the six traits of broad leaders. They are all within your reach and build upon innate characteristics with which you were born, such as being curious about new experiences, i.e., have a *prepared mind*, and then doing what feels right based on *balanced motivations*. And they probably reflect your better instincts too—such as applying *transferable skills* you are good at, calling a smarter friend from your *integrated network* to ask them about something you need help with, using your *contextual intelligence* to make an authentic connection with a new colleague, and learning more about a subject you care about because of your *intellectual thread*. If you embrace these traits and make them your defining qualities, you will be broad—and that will not just make society a better place to live in—you will be a more innovative leader, too.

Our call to action does not begin and end with individuals alone. Institutions across sectors have a large role to play in enabling this ecosystem of frictionless participation—in particular by valuing leaders with non-linear profiles and the six distinguishing traits appropriately, e.g., higher compensation, increased visibility, faster track to senior management, etc., and centering their talent management policies on seeking breadth, not just depth, of experience in key hires at the top, middle, and entry levels. Academic institutions—in which we place our trust to appropriately educate our future leaders—must also rethink their philosophy and approach to educating. University provosts, deans, and professors should ask themselves: What is the true purpose of education and are we preparing our students to lead in complex, cross-sector environments?

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