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Context to the nugget

Thinking about a career has moved away from a linear notion – educate, work, retire. Also the idea of working in one company for the rest of your life has become obsolete. So how should one think about their career in this digital age? How can people stay relevant? Abhijit believes that skills will become obsolete quicker and gives tips about how to navigate their careers.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I want to talk about building careers. I read your book and found two or three themes quite interesting. One is about commoditization of expertise, second is about being perpetual beta, and the third is moving from a 'T' to a 'Pi' in terms of how you build capability. So, one, how should people think about careers, how has that paradigm changed in the world we are in? And second, how do people think about staying relevant given the number of moving pieces?

Abhijit Bhaduri (AB): We have moved from a time when people stayed in one company over their lifetime. That is my dad's generation. They kind of stayed in one company and never changed and that's how the world was; it was a far more stable, predictable world. Then came people like us, who actually started off in one company and then moved through different employers. I've moved through several employers and sort of done that. And we are now going to hit to a time when individuals are actually going to hold multiple jobs. One individual will be employed simultaneously with three or four employers. And then, there is going to be another disruption because skills are going to become obsolete very quickly and business models are actually going to go out of the window very quickly. You will come to a scenario where most people will get forced to shift out of a particular company or particular career and they will hop through careers. So, you could be a software programmer one day, and then as that skill becomes obsolete and you sort of are no longer the prized commodity in the market, people will switch maybe and run a coffee shop somewhere and then maybe pick up another skill, learn music and teach music somewhere for a living, and then comeback and learn the latest language and then maybe comeback to something else and maybe teach history somewhere. So, the ability for people to navigate through careers is actually going to be driven by people's ability to learn many different things. The more you can learn many different things, the more opportunities are going to come for you. And the more you are going to get hung up about, you know, 'so I have to wait to be certified and coached and do all that,' I think it's going to be very hard for people to live with that paradigm because those options will reduce dramatically.

DJ: Specifically, your views on moving from a 'T' to a 'Pi'. Are there examples where people have done it well?

AB: You remember I was talking about this individual who's an expert in machine learning and has got interest in archaeology and loves classical music and has dreams of writing a book? This is pretty much people who can live in that 'and' world, the polarities. They are as comfortable talking about artificial intelligence and machine learning as they are about discussing the nuances of great fiction...

DJ: It's not even a Pi, right? It looks like an octopus, the number of...

AB: It's actually the fact that. You have one leg of that symbol [pi] that is straight and the other's got a little curve there, which in my mind is the piece which is you learn about many different things so that you are able to use your expertise in that other depth area across many different contexts. So, this person, for example, that I was talking about, he's created apps for the healthcare industry. He's done it a bunch of different times, and he says that it's insight that he's gained from his archaeology expeditions. And I was trying to figure out, how archaeology is connected to building apps and he then explained to me the principles. When you look at a site, how do you deconstruct something which you have no clue about? So, how do you sort of go to a particular site and then look at the artefacts which are lying there and then say that you pick up something. What could this have been used for, what is the possibility? And he was saying that the important thing is to not get conditioned by, what would I use it for? So, what would somebody from a different time and generation have used it for? And that I think is the mindset which is going to thrive in the new world. So, 'and' in a very blatant way.

DJ: One of the points that you touched upon is the gig economy. I think as we move towards a world where the boundary walls are coming down given technology is making coordination a lot easier and seamless what's your advice to people in terms of how they think about committing to an organization and building a career there versus participating in the gig economy through a portfolio of strengths?

AB: I think organizations, if they are able to leverage and get people excited in multiple ways, to the example that if when the person's ability to code is diminishing, and they aren't being effective in that world and they're changing over to a different language altogether inside the organization, the same individual could be kept engaged. If I know that this person's really passionate about starting their own café, then the person could start the café inside the organization. Potentially, it's a frivolous example, but then people can move between adjacencies...

DJ: It's a great way to think about the need for the organization to listen as well to the aspiration of the individual. It's not just a standard path, right?

AB: Yeah! Because we assume that everybody who is an engineer, loves to be an engineer. This is a mistaken assumption. People have many different aspects and I think this is the one big shift in the workplace which is already happening. The ability of the employer to encourage you to bring your full self to work, so the work, whatever you are doing, bringing in your hobbies and your passion and your interest and that little dream, putting all of that into the work that you are doing today, whatever it is and figuring out a way to build that into the work that you are doing. I think it's the definition of very successful careers or employee engagement. Employee engagement is not about celebrating birthdays of employees, which is how a lot of companies do it, because they are like frivolous transactions. But if you are really able to engage people and teach them different skills and keep them curious, that's one of the biggest things about building people's engagement.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Couple of books comes to mind in this context one is the book by a former Professor of mine from London business School Lynda Gratton in a book "100 Years Life". She talks about the fact that earlier people led a reasonably linear life and moved from education to career to retirement in a sequential way. She says that if you knew somebodies age you knew their stage. Now that paradigm is shifted completely you might have a 27 year old taking a sabbatical after selling off his company or a 65 year old doing a PHD to reskill himself or herself. The second book that comes to mind is a book "The Alliance" by Reid Hoffman one of the Co founders of LinkedIn in the book he and the other authors talk about situations where loyal talented employees might find themselves passionate about something which might occasionally be tangential to where the organization is headed. I feel its become a lot more critical for organization to listen intantly to their employees and see if they can cab out flexiable career paths or projects where common ground can be found between where the company wants to goand what energize the individual. In the book they talk about structuring win-win alliances almost like the 6 month rotation program that new graduates are put through for employees and organization to craft this and take stock of it and move forward. Thank you for listening. For more please visit playtopotential.com

End of nugget transcription

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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