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Generalists, Specialists, and the Best Experts: Where do Systems Thinkers Fit In?

Joshua Hughes
Portland State University

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GENERALIST / SPECIALIST A generalist is someone who has studied a little bit of everything, and in the end knows nothing well in particular. By contrast, a specialist is someone who has studied a single subject, and as a consequence does not even know his own subject, because every item of knowledge is related to other components of the whole system. The good scholar or scientist—like the good chef, manager, clinician, or orchestra conductor—is an expert in one field or craft, and knowledgeable in many. Like a mouse, he can explore the details of a terrain; and, like an owl, he can also soar to get a good view of the landscape—mice and all. He is capable of learning new subjects as needed, as well as placing every particular subject in a wide context and a long-term perspective. He is thus open to multiple inputs and capable of multiple outputs. In sum, the best expert is the specialist turned generalist. This holds in all fields of thought and action, particularly in philosophy. **–Mario Bunge, *Philosophical Dictionary***

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new ideas
+
DISCUSSION

SYSTEMS SCIENCE



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**GENERALISTS, SPECIALISTS,
and the BEST EXPERTS:
Where do systems thinkers fit in?**

(DISCUSSION)

**Systems Science Seminar
November 6, 2009**

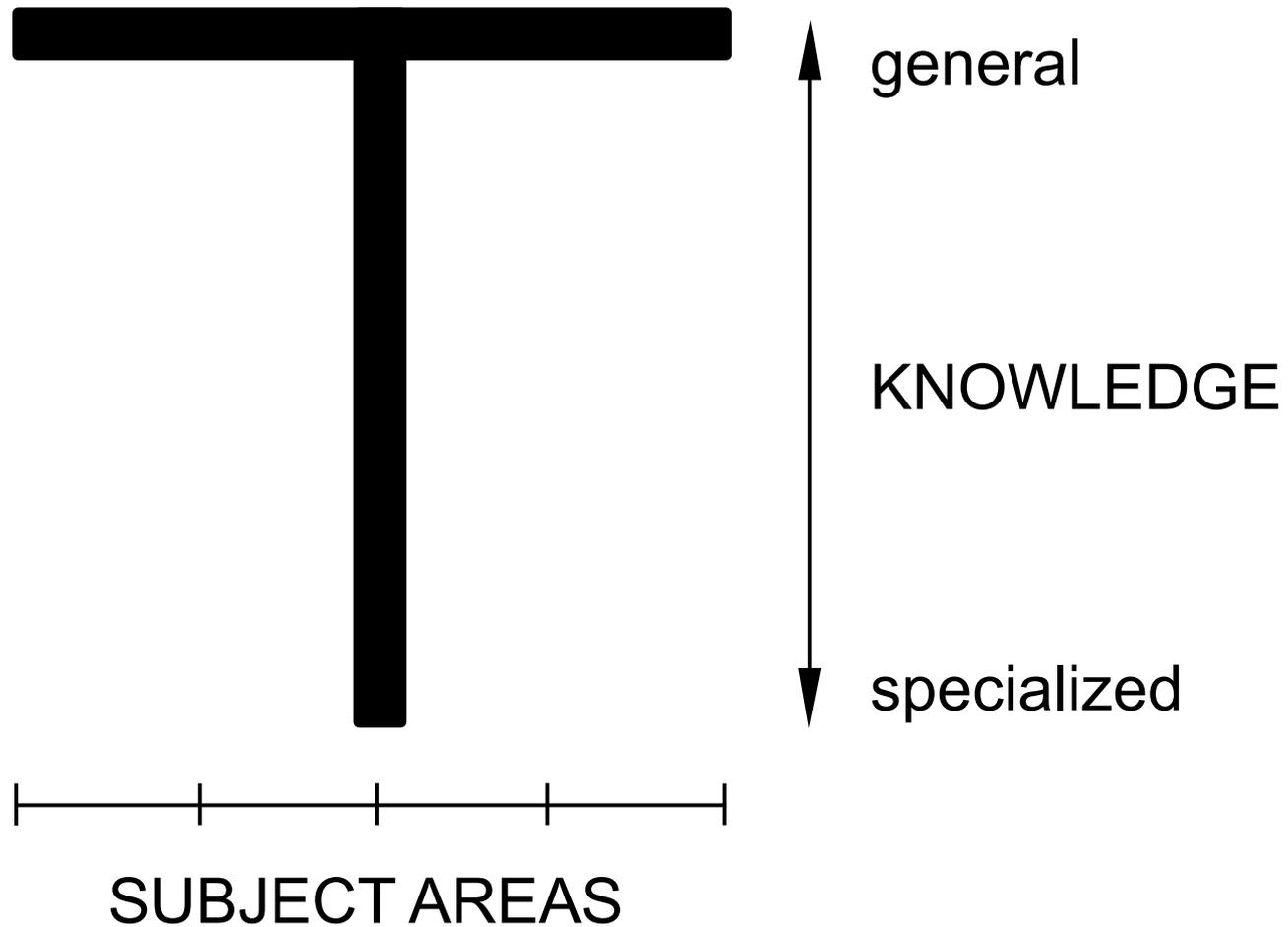
GENERALIST = knows a little about a lot

SPECIALIST = knows a lot about a little

BEST EXPERT = SPECIALIST → GENERALIST

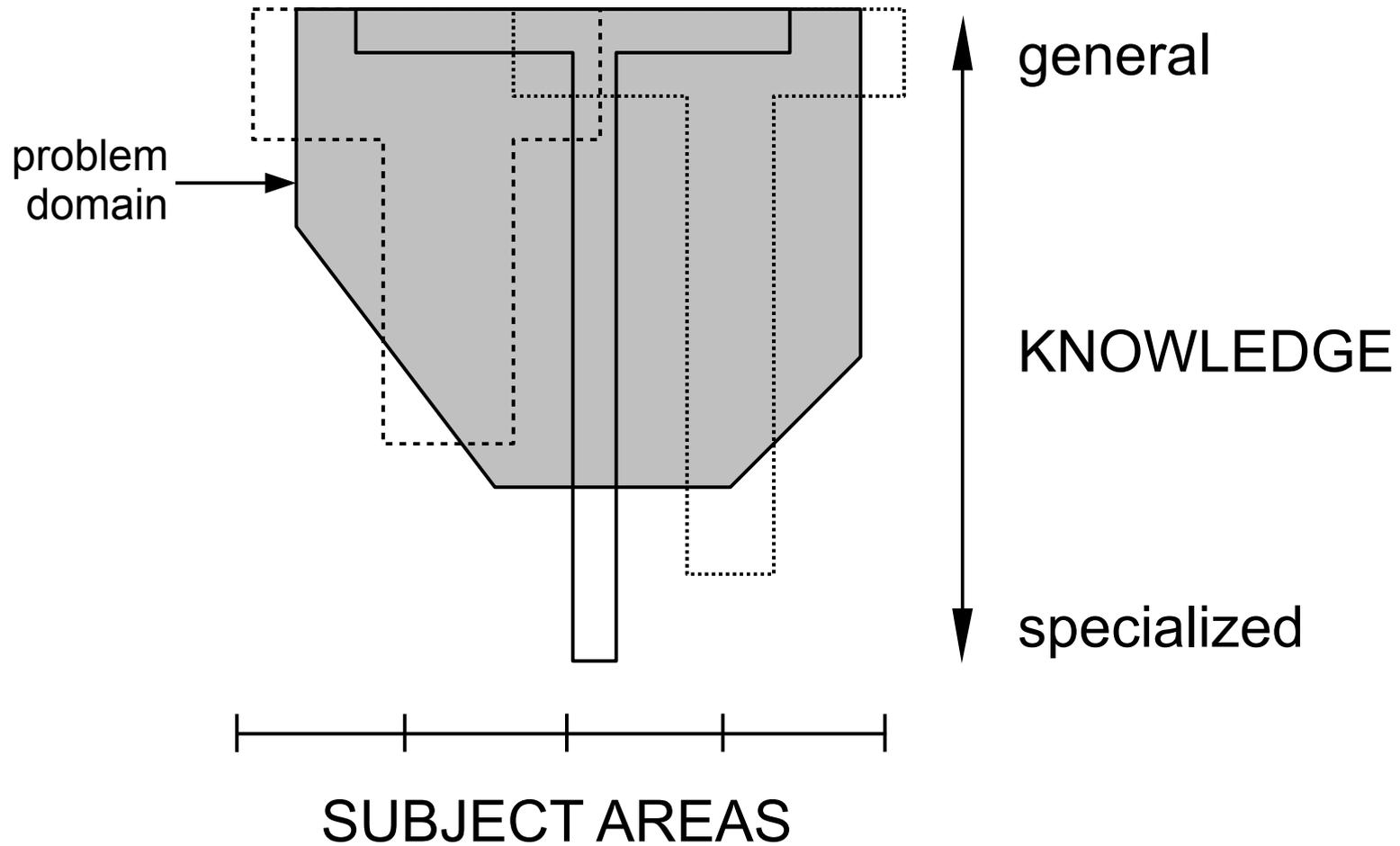
(Holds true in all fields!)

The BEST EXPERT is “T-shaped”*



*A.D. Hall

The BEST "EXPERT" is a TEAM



GENERALIST = knows a little about a lot

SPECIALIST = knows a lot about a little

BEST EXPERT = SPECIALIST → GENERALIST

How would you classify systems practitioners?

Systems analysts?

Systems theorists?

>>> *Does it matter?* <<<

QUESTIONS (small)

- Are you interested in being a general problem solver, or do you have a specific (i.e. specialized) problem you'd like to solve using systems thinking?
- Can you describe an instance when your knowledge of systems science gave you an insight you would not otherwise have had?

QUESTIONS (big)

- What roles can systems theorists, analysts, and practitioners play in national and global debates?
- Do (or will) the public, politicians, and other experts accept systems thinkers as experts?
- Can (or do) systems practitioners and theorists act as liaisons between specialists or between specialists and the public?
- Can you think of a field or a problem that is not being considered from a systems perspective but should be?
- Can you think any field in which systems science would *not* be useful?