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## PERFORMANCE TRIPLET – LEARNINGS FROM THE WORLD OF SPORTS

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***Talent, Technique and Technology & Tools can be the driving factor while helping organizations and teams in delivering consistent results. In this article we relate the developments in the track and field jumping events over a period of time with performance in a business context.***

Helping organizations and individuals perform better has been part of my role for almost two decades. In this journey I got exposed to different variables that impact performance. Most of the concepts that I studied as well implemented, in some way did influence shaping my views in this area. I realized that there are some fields where celebration of performance attains heroic levels. Individuals become legends and leave an indelible mark in the psyche of swathes of the population. Study of such fields can provide great insights on performance. One such field is sports and its therefore quite obvious why we have volumes of literature coming out of sports that helps, guides, influences subject of performance in many other arenas specially organizations.

My experiences helped me to arrive at what I call a performance triplet. Three key factors that impact performance in a significant way. They are Talent, Technique and Technology & Tools.

## **Talent, Technique and Technology & Tools**

I'll take recourse to three different sports, all part of track and field jumping events, to explain the performance triplet.

### ***Talent***

Let me first take Talent, to explain this I'll use Triple Jump as a sport. This has been a modern Olympics event since the Games' inception in 1896. The athlete performs three phases of the triple jump: the "hop" phase, the "bound" or "step" phase, and the "jump" phase. These three phases are executed in one continuous sequence. There have been some changes in the game e.g. it was a foul if an athlete, while jumping, touches or scrapes the ground with his/her "sleeping leg" till 1980. However by and large the game hasn't changed significantly and the change in records can be largely attributed to the raw talent and practice (which polishes the talent further) of athletes which gets better and better with modern usage of tools & technologies, to record and study the performance. The gold records have moved from 13.71 m to 18.17 m in the Olympics and the world record is 18.29 m in the male category.

### ***Technique***

Let's move to the next one, Technique (method of accomplishing a desired goal). To understand this one, I'll refer to another sport from track and field jump category- High Jump. High jump was among the events in the first modern Olympic Games, held in Athens in 1896. It has evolved over the years and the participating athletes have established new records utilizing their talent, practicing rigorously, leveraging change in the tools e.g. from saw dust to sand then foam-rubber landing mats. However, one of the critical changes that took place over the years was the technique of jump. At different times athletes tried scissors, western roll, straddle and a modified version of straddle called dive straddle techniques. It was 1968 Olympics that changed the way we visualize an athlete perform a high jump. This was the year when an athlete with a civil engineering background significantly changed the technique of the jump that led him to win gold in the Olympics. He was Dick Fosbury who came up with what is known as Fosbury-flop, a technique in which the athlete does the bar clearance on his back, with his body horizontal and perpendicular to the bar. It was this change in technique that revolutionized the game and hugely impacted new records in the coming years.

### ***Technology & Tools***

The last one in this triplet is Technology & tools. To understand its impact on performance, let's go through another sport called Pole Vault. The sport is a modern Olympic event since 1896. The first world record in the men's pole vault was recognized by the International Association of Athletics Federations in 1912. The significant change in this sport has been in the area of material of the pole. From wood to bamboo to fiber glass to carbon fiber. The records have also changed because of the impact of new technology. Maximum height ever attained on a wooden pole was 3.62 meters. In the 40s-50s with bamboo poles, athletes jumped around 4.5 meters. The maximum height on a bamboo pole was recorded at 4.77 meters. With fiberglass athletes could go above 5 meters and now they go above 6 meters. The current pole vault world record of 6.16 meters was achieved on a glass fiber pole by Renaud Lavillenie. With the change in the technology of poles, the techniques also changed (to adapt to the new technology) e.g. the athletes now need to strike the ground fast, jump up quickly and cannot delay swinging up.

Thus, we realize that the triplet of Talent, Technique and Technology & tools has its role to play and there are times when one has a higher impact on performance than the other two. Of-course there is an interplay amongst the three, if one changes the others need to respond. We do remember the introduction of synthetic Astroturf in the game of hockey and its impact on India's performance. The techniques of trapping the ball, dribbling and passes wasn't the way to win the game, with the introduction of new technology.

## How organizations use the performance triplet

I realized the impact of this triplet in the performance of individuals, teams and organizations. Few examples that come to my mind are, the talent of telling a great story with confidence supported with data and insights, can increase a budding entrepreneur's chances of arranging funds from different sources. The technique of getting into a joint venture with a local firm to work around the laws like FDI restrictions, adopted by different MNCs is well known and at times even celebrated in business circles (great innovation, great strategy, brilliant move etc.). Another example of technique in business is reverse merger takeover –a process whereby a company, usually a small to mid-sized firm, buys the corporate shell of a defunct American company still trading on the penny stock exchange, and then offers a secondary offering of the shares premised on its own growth potential (not commenting on the right and wrong aspect of such techniques). Media these days is replete with stories of leaders/organizations procuring/creating and deploying right tools & technologies to scale the business or remain relevant in the future. A brilliant idea of some talented professional, supported by the techniques of designing smart processes to produce and market, however, bereft of right tools & technologies may not have a good chance to survive and thrive. On the contrary a borrowed idea with the rigor of adequate processes supported by required tools & technologies still has a significant chance of success.

## What our experience tells us

In my experience of dealing with individuals, teams and organizations, real breakthroughs that have the potential of giving lasting results, lies in identifying which part(s) of the triplet at a particular stage has the potential of creating maximum value e.g. with one SME business owner, who had a stable line of business and wanted to experiment in a new area (however was getting sucked into operational issues of the current business), the solution was to create a COO position to free up sometime (**Technique**). Another business owner who was earlier into trading, entered into retail and created a small sales force. He was losing sleep because earlier he thought he had absolute control over his business, but now there was this sales force moving around and he didn't have a clue about where they were and this was very disturbing for him and had started impacting him at various levels. In few conversations he realized that this idea of strong control is a limiting one however he also confessed that for him to change overnight that too in an area which for him at this stage was critical, wasn't feasible. So, I first addressed his immediate concern by exploring low cost yet effective and easily available tools to keep a track of sales force (**Technology & tools**) and then worked on some deeper issues of trust and letting go. The last one is about a team that had become disengaged as they had been a part of two acquisitions in three years and were asked to do different things to prove their worth. By the time the environment became stable and direction was shared, the team had lost its spark which was reflecting in its performance. The work with this team centered around igniting confidence and enthusiasm around what this team was known for, what was the contribution of this team to the success of the organization and how would this team consistently leverage their core skills and competencies (**Talent**) keeping in mind the new direction shared by the organization. In each of these cases it's the performance triplet that helped me identify the issue and then design and deploy the solution jointly with the client. In a lot of these scenarios, the solution was either about identifying and working on the core Talent (s) or creatively designing a customized version of a Fosbury-flop or re-examine, change or introduce new Pole(s), in order to help the client, perform better and grow.

**To know how to leverage the performance triplet of Talent, Technique and Technology & tools you can contact us at [info@thepragyan.com](mailto:info@thepragyan.com)**