

The problematic apprentice problem for specialization

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Abstract. Adam Smith recommends specialization but I present a problem of when you are stuck with a certain apprentice but they don't seem suited to your specialism. If you were less specialized or more versatile, you could solve the problem.

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"I can't even immortalize him in fiction

With this much friction"

Division of labour and specialization, that is the way to achieve ends, at least according to a Scottish Enlightenment economist. You specialize in one task and I specialize in another and we combine our efforts or trade (Smith Bk. 1, Ch. 1). He envisions a world of narrow specialists. But let's imagine that an apprentice joins your organization. And somehow you are stuck with this apprentice or getting rid of them is regarded as bad: if you get rid of them, a decent hard-working talented person like them, then your reputation is in tatters. ("But I don't have good chemistry with them.") So you have your specialism, baking bread or whatever it may be, and you are trying to teach it to them. But there is a problem. They are not suited to it. (Also, you have examined their character and they are not suited, in your opinion, to being in charge of your organization.)

If you were less specialized or more versatile, you could do something else and they would be your apprentice in that, something they are more suited to. You could solve this

problem: the problem of the problematic apprentice. However, I wonder whether an economist would deny that this situation can even arise, where it is rational for you to do something else for the sake of an apprentice. They would explain about the invisible hand and employment. I would like to say, “See next paper,” but I shall instead say, “Just in case it can arise, I am registering it.”

Reference

Smith, A. 1904 (originally 1776). *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. London: Methuen. Available at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smWN.html>