

FROM POSSESS TO EXCEL



A reflection by
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Introduction

An ebook!!!

The electronic adventure of the 20th century!

Very light, easy to read on a reader (the device, not the person!) Or even on a mobile phone. The ebooks are extraordinary tools to spread your content at a fast spade. So we tried to change the format so that everything works for your enjoyment and your cognitive enrichment!

The texts contained in my ebooks were first written as part of my blog. Why pay for this ebook? For a quick and smooth consultation! Indeed, posts have been written and published over a period of 10 years in some cases. The work of the publisher has therefore been to group posts into a continuous stream and intellectual satisfactory to ensure a greater understanding of the concepts conveyed.

The benefit for you, dear readers, is the opportunity to have a global vision on these concepts faster than me, the author of these texts. Indeed, by dint of writing, reflecting, correcting and refocusing my thoughts in the course of texts, I have come to better understand reality.

Warning: after several readings on my part, from my editors and the people who participated in the development of these ebooks, we realize that some parts may seem discontinuous, even out of an area of cervical turbulence of which the voracious opacity attracts the reader elsewhere ... perhaps never to return. Or, to quote Hubert Aquin, fall into the unspeakable elocution.

Do not worry: this momentary giddiness fades with time. A few years should do the job...

Just kidding ...

Wish you a good read

François Lavallée

The coolest organizational biologist on the planet (And the only existing one)

Will we survive abundance?

A strange question that Sebastien Paquet asked me during a friendly meeting.

Humans have evolved for a few million years in conditions that are not conducive to their survival. Their huge brains and frontal lobe allowed them to adapt to a hostile environment for which they had very little affinity.

No fur to protect it from the cold.

No claw to defend yourself.

No particular teeth effective for tearing meat.

No long legs to run.

No multiple reach (or rarely) and a gestation process almost too long to ensure survival.

BUT ... the human has survived.

Against all, the first humans imposed their dominion without really understanding their environment until practically destroying it (I leave us a chance to climb the slope).

In fact, we live in an era of unprecedented abundance. Recent technological and computer advances allow us to access almost everything.

Advances in artificial intelligence let us envision a future in which ALL repetitive, dangerous and banal tasks can be performed efficiently and quickly by machines.

Think about how you consume: Amazon has revolutionized our consumption with the choice we have, the competitive prices and the speed of delivery.

Think about your way of informing yourself: the web offers too many sources of information to list.

Think about how you move around: using GPS to navigate, selecting the best route, using a mobile app to find and pay for parking or calling a taxi.

Think about your music and your visual entertainment! Unlimited downloads, unlimited variety.

Thinking about your hobbies... we now have so many possibilities that the limiting factor is the time we can devote to it. You may have even bought discount TV shows without even having the time to listen to them before buying more!

This is just the beginning!
And the beginning of some problems.

Our body, our brain has evolved into another type of environment.

NOTHING was easy.

NOTHING was abundant.

Our evolution is a story of survival and rarity.

Are we able to adapt quickly to this new abundance?

To see the uber-rich behavior of our planet, I doubt it. Indeed, just look at the lifestyle of these rich and famous people to conclude that few of them survive their wealth and abundance: sexual misconduct, violence, depressions, and even bankruptcy ... it would be like voluntary sabotage or an impulse to re-create difficult situations.

When a bacterium begins to reproduce in a culture broth or on a petri dish, its offspring continues the trend until the resources that allow its growth are exhausted. And the situation always ends in the same way: death by starvation.

When a human cell decides to ignore its environment and initiates an unrestrained multiplication without respecting the organism from which it comes, the host is diagnosed with cancer. The end is the same ... death.

When an organization forgets its mission and only thinks about the growth of its profits, it does so for the benefit of its shareholders and to the detriment of its customers. The last

hundred years of economic growth, however, demonstrate the inevitable end of organizations that have not responded in time.

The big organizations that have been part of the Fortune 500, this Capitalist Hall of Fame, do not stay on the list forever.

Abundance of income in a government inevitably leads to unnecessary spending and excesses that come back to haunt us for several generations.

And if abundance itself was the element against which humans could not adapt?

Our biology has evolved slowly over the eons.

The technology around us is changing at an accelerated pace, a rate peculiar to its acceleration. It's an exponential movement that artificial intelligence will not slow down. Are we able to adapt as quickly?

Far be it from me to refuse technology! On the contrary ! If we can free the human from his dirty work, let's do it!

However, the reflection of Mr. Paquet deserves attention: will we survive abundance?

I wrote a series of articles in English on the subject. In English because of the inspiring sound of the words used :

From POSSESS to ACCESS: the new economy of access to everything without having to own.

From ACCESS to EXCESS: Overabundance and its impact on our behaviours.

From EXCESS to EXCISE: The importance of cutting fat to keep only the meat!

From EXCISE to EXCEL: the ultimate positive impact of sorting!
Is abundance just another enemy to control?

Our brain, the only selective advantage that distinguishes us from the rest of the biosphere, will it once again raise us to a higher level of our initial reflexes?

We have a superb emergency system thanks to our adrenal glands, the famous fight or flight reaction!

A danger ? A rush of adrenaline and hop! The enemy is dead or far away!

The modern world has a modified version of this mechanism : the enemy is now a vociferous boss or a bellicose negotiator. Our social reflexes have “evolved” to stop us from smashing his face as the only way to win the discussion (barely in some situation but still...we are pretty much in control...apparently).

Our body, however, has more difficulty coping with the abundance of food ... the accumulation of fat in our arteries testifies to our difficulty in overcoming this abundance.

Access to millions of free musical tracks already puts a great financial strain on the creators of this music, not to mention the impact on our ability to enjoy their works, now diluted, almost lost, among our endless playlists.

Will you survive abundance?
Certainly not if you do not realize its impact.

From Possess to Access

Ray Kurtzweil thinks humans will be able to build a computer more powerful than a brain around 2025-2030.

What is a brain? Billions of neurons all connected to create billions more connections between them.

Current estimations of the number of neurons in a typical brain is 86 billion. And as many non-neuronal cells. Overall, less than in a typical primate's brain.

What distinguished us from these noble primates ?

Well, for one, technology.

And two, the level of social interactions. Aided by technology for the last few decades.

Technology has always pushed the human race forward. Technology is adopted at an ever increasing pace.

The printing press is one technology that has dramatically shrank the world. Information allowed us to re-think our role in the universe. Information changed our view of the world. But it moved slowly at first.

The telegraph, the radio and closer to us the television, increased the speed at which we could interact with the world. As each technology develops, its adoption rate is shortened. From the invention of electricity in the 1873, to the telephone three years later, followed by the radio and television in 1897 and 1926 to the more "modern" technologies such as the PC in 1975, the mobile phone in 1983 (a mastodon in those days!) and finally the web in 1991. Astonishingly, only 7 years were necessary for 25% adoption rate.

Technology is moving so fast that our brain just cannot follow.

Well, at least mine.

I remember my first encounter with a fax machine, in 1989.

My boss asked me to 'fax' my analysis results. At the time, I was a molecular biologist (still am but I stopped practicing my DNA fingerprint stunts!). I therefore printed my most recent yeast DNA fingerprint and walked toward the "fax" machine. I looked at the whole contraption, asked a few smart sounding questions (huh?) to the administrative assistant and realized rapidly that I was not prepared enough ... went back to my office and

photocopied my report to send THAT copy to my boss. *Hey, I did not want to look foolish in front of my colleagues!*

Only when the “copy” was eaten up by the fax machine and was then rolled back out, did I realize that I had mistakenly misidentified the device: this was a FAX machine and NOT a teleportation pod.

I stopped making copies of my “to-be-faxed” reports thereafter.

Pfff ... silly young molecular biologist.

A few weeks later, still excited about the fact that I did not have to mail my report or, worse, drive to the head office to hand it in, I was now quite comfortable with the fax. I almost gave it a nickname FF... fast fax. Hey, hey... we had quite a relationship going on there!

I thought I was quite smart, using this fax machine. The future was in my hands!

Or so I thought.

The future might have been in my hands, it was not in my brain! I realized this a few days later when I was talking with a friend and I almost, almost offered to fax him 20 dollars to pay for a concert ticket.

Offered to fax 20 bucks. Oh, yes. Forget about fake dollar bills, the fax would wipe counterfeit activity from the face of the earth. Yeah right.

New technology appears faster than our brain can adapt to it.

How long did it take for you to stop buying CD in favour of downloading (legally or not)? It took me quite a while. In fact, I still prefer buying CDs to downloading. My two sons (22 and 27) think I am crazy, especially with the advent of subscription services (circa 2014-2015) where I could have access to zillions of tracks for 10\$/month.

Ah.... here is the catch. Technology allows us to access all this whereas the 20th century old-fashioned way of thinking promoted the possession of things. Going from POSSESS to ACCESS makes a lot of sense.

But not for me.

I still long for those HUGE album covers that vinyls provided. Ah, to touch, see (and yes smell) those huge images, right there in my hands.

I still like to touch the CD. Insert it in my CD player, or portable CD player, or CD drive on the computer.

I still love to look at the art. Heck, I even buy special editions of some albums that include real hardcover books and the whole gimmick.

I understand the technology. Some of my clients think I am a geek, always trying the new stuff. And I am! I am connected to social media, Evernote as a personal LMS (Learning management system), Twitter and what have you.

And I do not fax dollar bills anymore.

But I asked my wife to download some wine at the restaurant the other night....

Ah well...

But then, here is the trick....I have connections, lots of them. My wife is one of them. So are you, dear readers.

And much like the brain, our connection with colleagues, acquaintances and friends increase our power.

I might have problems understanding that the fax is not a teleportation device but my friends will help me get through this ...fast! OR I will live with the shame for the very long next dinner with them. Hey, they are here to help!

Technology will always move a lot faster than our capacity to adapt to it.

We are getting better at this and our network is a part of it.

How many friends do you have on social networks ? How fast do they tell you about the latest “thing”, be it a new game, a new app or a new device ? How much more rapidly do you watch the latest news about what-have-you in some god-forsaken place?

How fast to get wiser ?

Yes. Wiser.

Forget about the gazillions of feline-related activities videos on YouTube and the pseudo scientific discoveries of these weird sect-like groups all around the world (hey, just this morning, a psychic sent me an email, a very personalized email with MY OWN VERY PERSONAL tarot reading... *bien sûr!*)

Forget about the stupid comment on Facebook about the latest gastrointestinal inducing movement of this new vegetarian diet....

Social networks ARE making us wiser. Slowly but surely.

Very slowly...

Sooo....

The brain is 50 % neurons and 50 % non-neuron cells, the latter helping the neurons make connections, faster, more efficiently. Think of them as the technological support to make the connections between the neurons.

Now think about your network as the lever to make your brain functions better. Your networks will help you produce more synapses between your brain cells. They will help you connect the dots...quite literally.

Ray Kurzweil predicts that we will build a supercomputer capable of hosting a full human conscience by 2030 (give or take a few weeks).

Pfff.... why bother with this?

We already have the Web with its billions of connections, its billions of sources of information and our very own processor to prevent the information overload associated with it: our very own personal knowledge network!

I might not be able to download some wine anytime soon but chances are, one of my social network contacts has the very one bottle I need right now and who knows, he or she might be willing to share it with me...tonight!!!

I might not possess it but I can access it.

Profound paradigm shift. We do not need to possess information anymore. But we really need to know how to access it. This is the future.

We need to understand this.

Access, not possess. **NOW !**

From Access to Excess

From POSSESS to ACCESS to EXCESS....

It dawned on me quite unexpectedly.

I had resisted subscribing to a music service for years. My sons, both younger —*bien sûr!* — and far wiser — of course ! — than me, had prompted me to join the service.

It is almost free dad!

Instead of you shopping around to find the better deals, you simply search and... *voilà!*

Instead of you buying literally dozens upon dozens of CDs every year, you will get them all for \$10 a month!

But then, money was never at the heart of the problem.

I can understand the younger generation, used to download everything for free, although illegally.

This is a sad reality of life. When you are young, you want everything but cannot afford it, whereas, as you get older, you have almost everything you desire already and extra money to spend on ...nothing.

Well, I have always spent money on music. A little bit more now as I purchase deluxe editions.

I always cherished my purchases.

I still have this perception that owning the music will make you love it more. At least, you will try your heart out to love it once you have spent a few dollars on it. At least, that was the reason I listened over and over again to some LP in my youth (especially this damned live LP from Goddo...Goddo.... why did I even bother with this...arrrrgh... week now I know I do not like this one...yep, it was worth the \$3.99 I paid for it).

I know how much music I buy every month: let's say 10 albums.

I know how much new music I crave every month. I usually download a few albums just for fun, say 10 more.

I also know I rarely listen to a CD less than five times once I purchased it. I always assume that music written and recorded has an intrinsic value if somebody took the trouble to put it down on a recording machine/computer etc.

I give it a chance. Or five.

At \$10 a month that would be a lot less than one dollar per recording downloaded.

Will I invest anytime listening five times a download to “love” it if I paid 25 cents for it?

I doubt it.

Will I continue to buy albums I love?

Will I love albums I listened to only a few times?

Will I listen to them again?

Going from POSSESS to ACCESS is quite a paradigm shift for a lot of people.

I used to buy lots of magazines. Single magazines or subscription. Some I read while patiently performing daily gastro-intestinal maintenance, having a stack of great reading right next to the device required for the maintenance. Some I read while eating breakfast.

Some I stopped reading because the publisher stopped printing them, “offering” the iPad version to their customers...For some reasons, I do not carry my iPad in the bathroom.

Most of the articles in these magazines are available online eventually. Heck, there is a lot more stuff online than what is

available in print! Why do I even bother taking the time to register for a subscription?

Because I need to take action.

Because the act of deciding, the act of commission to an annual subscription is very different than simply browsing superficially with a very limited commitment through a series online articles.

Because there is ..simply.. too..much..stuff on the Web.

Harold Jarche, one on my thought mentors, has designed what he calls PKM, Personal Knowledge Mastery, an essential skill of the 21st century to seek, sense and share information.

An essential skill to sort through the plethora of information available to anybody on the Web.

This will prevent unsuspecting net surfers and information cravers going from POSSESS to ACCESS to EXCESS.

But what about my music service?

Music is the language of the soul.

My very personal soul is, I am convinced, quite unique. So is my soul's language. Music talks to me like it talks to no one else.

I can share my musical treasures and my wide array of different musical horizons but ultimately I, and only I listen to music. This

is especially true with earphone today. Loud-speakers are great to share music. God knows my neighbours got a taste of Iron Maiden early in the 80s!

From excess to excise

From Excess to Excise

Continued from last chapter.

I am up to head in new music.

I am rapidly being overwhelmed!

Soooooooo much new sounds! Sooo much creativity!

I have always been an avid listener to new music. I still buy lots of music (in CD format mind you!)

But I have decided to try a subscription music service for a year. It is so easy!

You read a magazine. They mention a new recording by a band you do not know. You take a look in your music service *et voilà!*

You keep on reading and pop another new band!

Et voilà once again.

Your smart phone is now full of new music.

But then... is the fun to get new music

or

to listen to the stuff?

I am literally up to my ears in new music.

I need to find some way to cut the crap and extract only the music I love and cherish, only the music I will listen to again and again.

I need to filter out the rest.

Infobesity is exactly the same.

There is simply too much information around us all the time. Every waking moment finds you bombarded with tons of new information.

New social networks users go up every day!

Social networks are now present in **vast numbers**. Facebook and LinkedIn are just the tip of the iceberg!

This is scary! To think of all those people potentially wasting their time ... oh ... woah!

Wait!!!

Clay Shirky was talking about cognitive surplus... not time wasting!

Indeed, Wikipedia was created BECAUSE some people were willing to spend some time reading and browsing and... contributing to the site.

How could those people filter out the crap from the ocean of information?

If they can... can I do the same?

I keep talking about this new discipline of the 21st century. My friend and colleague Harold Jarche has designed a workshop around this discipline that he calls PKM, [Personal Knowledge Mastery](#).

This discipline is basically to design a methodology, a personal system, to help you surf through information available from the web but also from other sources.

The same method can be applied to music selection.

Basically, it comes down to

- What do you need?
- And who do you know who might know it... or who do THEY know who might know it...

The power of the network!

The whole point is, some people in your knowledge networks certainly know more about any topic than you, the so called experts.

OR they might know how to summarize what you need, the godly curators!

OR they might be or know deep thinkers ...the creators of new wisdom!

BUT... they should all be part of your knowledge networks.

Remember the village wise men/women?

They were the guardians of traditions, storytellers of yore and expert shoppers....they just knew who were the real bargains!

What we once thought as gossip proved to be essential to direct your search for knowledge.

Contemporary social networks now fulfill part of this role.

You now need to find who to connect with in order to acquire this information.

You need your knowledge network to EXCISE the important stuff from the EXCESS that is threatening to engulf you.

Going back to music, I realized that I am the one some of my friends refer to for their choice of new music. I browse and listen lightly. I choose what I think will be appropriate for them.

I suggest a few things out of the plethora of new music I test and assess.

And they love it.

But who will do it for me?

Do I even want that ?

NO. The rush of discovery is enough. I do not need to dig too deep to be satisfied.

My friend does that for me after my initial selection. The process comes full circle.

I am part of their knowledge circle. They are part of mine.

I do the same thing with my community of practices. My clients expect me to discover new magical gadgets, concepts, notions and principles for them. I do not dig but simply point the way. And they feed me back the recently discovered insights with a new level of illumination.

I am part of their knowledge network. They are part of mine.

The journey is not complete however.

We went from POSSESS to ACCESS

From ACCESS to EXCESS

From EXCESS TO EXCISE

and now we need to go from EXCISE to...

From Excise to Excel

This is the last part of the series on infobesity.

This is where it all makes sense.

This is where we win all or loose all.

The final piece of the puzzle, going from possess to access
From access to excess
From excess to excise
and finally... From excise to EXCEL.

It used to be that knowledge was power. Possessing knowledge meant that you, alone, knew who to talk to, what to talk about, what to decide, etc.

This time is a thing of the past.

The Web, Wikipedia, YouTube and your smart phone changed all that.

The information is now available to all who desire to know.

And with this abundance comes the required level of crap.

Back to my favourite analogy: music.

In the old days, music labels and publishing companies controlled the kind of music that was sold. They basically decided what we would listen to, what was worth purchasing. Today, any decent computer will allow any band to realize complete album with sound quality superior to a lot of album realised in 20 or 40 years ago.

Gone are the big studios.

Gone are the producers or sound engineers.

Here is the infinite universe of musical creativity.

FOR FREE!

Whether on Youtube, MySpace.com, bandcamp.com and or the individual bands' website.

The old system had a way to filter crap from the start. Using THEIR filters, mind you, not ours.

The new system has almost no crap-filters. And it seems we had a very high tolerance for crap. Heck... tapes are coming back as a cheap alternative to CD manufacturing... unbelievable but true!

So, who is going to filter all this?

Too much music is, in a way, worse than not having enough.

Music executive used to EXCISE the crap from the rest for our benefit. What was left for us to buy in record stores was, well... available. The stress level was quite low. I remember when a group of friends decided from a collective: we would each purchase a different album and share the results every Friday night thereby decreasing the risk and increasing the amount of new music. A lot a taping would generally follow these listening sessions.

The same happens today with knowledge networks. Your knowledge network includes people you trust, people who read stuff you don't, people who think differently and are willing to share their findings with you...and the world.

And hopefully, you will do the same, sharing your reflexions and findings with the world.

This part of the process to extract knowledge from the Web is now essential.

This part of the process cannot be accomplished alone.

But nothing is new. You used to do this before the Internet was omnipresent in your life! You used to do this when you did tape-trading, when you lent a book to a friend, when you passed last

month's magazine to a neighbour, when you photocopied a nice article for a colleague.

It is all the same!

New tools now exist to do this efficiently on the Web. No need to print anything. Sort it on Evernote, Pocket, Diigo or any other of the dozens tools. Sort it and then retrieve it whenever necessary.

The trick is to design a sorting/retrieving mechanism that suits YOU.

Stopping the compulsion to possess information (or music) takes some efforts.

We are not just used to this. Our feeling of false security has been deeply rooted in our psyche. But it is really similar to a huge moose trying to hide behind a tree. Stupid behaviour.

Accessing the vast amount of information (or music) takes almost no effort at all!

Creating an account on Spotify, Deezer or Apple music is completed in less than a minute.

Creating an Evernote, pocket or what-have-you account is as easy.

Becoming overwhelmed is also very, very rapid. The excess is felt so rapidly and so completely that some people experience

physical discomfort after a few weeks. How can we keep track of those 400 (or 4000 !) people on the Twitter thread? How can I reply to those hundreds of friends on Facebook, or those 1000's contacts on LinkedIn?

We can't !

This is when the excision becomes a necessity.

Cleaning up our contacts, friends, pins, posts, etc. is a huge relief.

Getting in touch with competent curators is also much a relief. These trusted people you choose to include in your knowledge network do the job for you. Some very smart people spend a lot of time on the Web reading, extracting, summarizing and re-presenting information.

[Harold Jarche PKM model](#) describes the three S's : Seek, Sense and Share.

SEEK information via your knowledge network.

Make some **SENSE** out of it. The deep reflexion takes time but is the real benefit of having such a discipline approach to knowledge processing.

Finally, some people will **SHARE**. The best one are curators. They assemble information in such a way that it is digestible for the rest of us. A museum curator is responsible to assemble pieces of art into a meaningful collection. This takes expertise

and knowledge. Visitors then benefit from this knowledge when they tour the museum.

Anyone who frequently goes to museum will slowly become more knowledgeable about Art.

Anyone who persists in doing so WILL become very knowledgeable.

I remember reading an expert saying that ANYONE reading 50 books on any topics WILL become one of the world expert in this field.

50 books.

How many books a year do YOU read ?

Malcolm Gladwell in his "*Outliers*" book mentions that a top athlete/musician/artist will have spent 10 000 hours to refine his craft OR 5 years working full time (40h/week).

The common point is that they pinpoint an area. Any top pianist in the world today is a top performer ...on the piano. Not on the guitar.

A star sprinter is rarely a star marathoner.

They voluntarily **FOCUS** on one discipline.

Why should YOU do differently as far as information is concerned?

We all need to focus on the type of information that is relevant for us. Or a few areas at most.

OR... use what others have already deciphered.

Books are great for that.

But books take time to write and to be published. Any textbook, once published, is obsolete within a few years. Sometimes, they are obsolete as soon as they are available.

Why would you buy a book on recent Internet advances when everything about it is on the Web NOW ?

You need to find the right blogs, the right people talking about it etc.

And only then, will you go from EXCISE to EXCEL.

Once the process is complete, you will truly excel in your field.

The Montreal Marathon is held every Fall. About 20 000 people will run.

And only one will be the first to reach the final line.

Only one.

Going from EXCESS to EXCISE is the way to EXCEL.

I am then quite alone with my music service and full access to 30 millions songs.

I was recently reading a book on the history of black metal. Each band they discussed was also on my music service...wow... every chapter was accompanied by the music of the band that was covered in it! Wow!

I could experiment with the history, 15 minutes at a time.

Had I purchased everything, I would have had to wait a week to receive the CD after reading about it. Oh, yes, I would also have to pay for all this.

Now... instant gratification!

Or mortification in several cases as some black metal “artists” are pretty crappy.

There you have it.

From POSSESS to ACCESS to EXCESS...

I did not purchase any of this. (OK, OK, I already had some of it).

And I will NOT purchase most of it.

I will not ever again listen to this.

But... maybe I should... ah, no.

Will I miss something out of NOT investing more than 5 minutes in any of those bands ? Sure.

I noticed that all the music I listened to up to 2005 approximately is ingrained in my mind. Twenty years down the road, I can still remember most of it upon the first few notes.

Since 2005, maybe due to the increased amount of new music, I do not listen as frequently to my “favourite” albums. Oh, the old favorites are still there, but very few new “favorites” are integrated in my “favorite” playlist.

I still think there is merit in possessing music.

I definitively think there is merit in accessing all this music.

I am also pretty positive that the human brain will eventually find a way to adapt to this infobesity, be it information or music.

But I am not there yet.

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And finally, Maé-Li Gendron, who still astonishes me by her reading speed, by how fast she understands and accomplishes her tasks... and even more!

Oh yes ... it's a *cliché*, but ... special thanks to you readers. One always writes for oneself first, a pure act of cognitive egocentrism. But we really hope that our brain juice will be read by others and that it will make a difference.

Thank you.

Simply.

Truly.