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From Decision to Action

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Success is not backed up by reasons, but by results.

The Context Surrounding the Decision

We find ourselves in the era of hypercommunication and hyperconnection, characterized by ubiquitous immediacy, artificial intelligence (AI) that calculates and recalculates endlessly, data in oceanic quantities, and the illusion of freedom of choice and consumption. All this is at the tips of our fingers which have so many keys in front of them that they will never be able to press them all.

In this era, as Byung-Chul Han points out, information alone does not illuminate the world, and can even darken it. The rapid increase in informational entropy plunges us into a society in which the distinction between what is true and what is false has become blurred, because information circulates without reference to reality.

Big data suggests absolute knowledge—a new era. But in reality, Han insists, what it provides is correlations: if A happens, then often B also happens, but A is not necessarily the cause of B. The former indicates probability and the latter indicates a causal link. The former provides correlations and patterns, but not understanding. Calculation, unlike thought, always remains the same.

AI never reaches the conceptual level of knowing. It does not understand the results of its calculations. Calculation differs from thought in that it does not form concepts and does not proceed from one conclusion to another. It learns from the past, chooses between options given in advance, between one and zero. The intelligence of machines does not reach the depth of the enigma. Information and data have no depth.

It is necessary to reclaim human thought that goes beyond the calculation and resolution of problems, and that illuminates the world around us.

This technical note was prepared by professors Guido Stein and Luis Palencia. July 2022.

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The Least Desired Influence of Digitization

There is a zero sum relationship between online and offline interactions.

In his book *Digital Minimalism,* Cal Newport makes an incisive case for the obvious: that our relationship with digital tools has become dysfunctional and, in many cases, borders on pathology. The big players in the sector have invested billions of dollars in us surrendering to the screens, giving up control of several hours of our day. Smartphones, the digital internet, the platforms that connect billions of people have invaded our daily lives, radically changing our ways of doing, feeling, and even thinking. We are becoming aware of the impact of unlimited online activity on our minds and there are already empirical studies of how it affects habitual users.

According to studies carried out in the United States related to generations of which there are empirical data since 1930, nothing similar has ever been seen. The iGen is the generation with the worst mental health in decades, and it coincides with the fact that the smartphone is massively within their reach. They themselves admit it without hesitation: "We cannot live without social media, although it is driving us crazy." The social approval of others has become a very powerful engine of behavioral addiction.

This leads to a first conclusion: persistent communication in the form of processing and sending all kinds of messages with little interruption is correlated to negative effects on the chemical and neural processes that occur in students' brains. Perhaps it is because, in general, the human brain is not programmed to be constantly connected.[1] Teenagers, mainly, and the other generations, to a lesser extent, have lost much of our ability to process emotions, reflect, distinguish what matters, build solid personal relationships, and even disconnect from social media to redirect our energy towards other daily activities. Therefore, it should not surprise us that this leads to entity dysfunctions.

A New Philosophy of the Use of Technology to Better Diagnose

Currently, one of the main needs is to update our attitude towards the use of technology, in such a way that it allows us to maintain its best advantages and leave its most pernicious effects behind. Aiming towards medium and long-term efficacy, as opposed to the uninterrupted distraction that seems to save us from the boredom and loneliness that we're afraid of, but is nevertheless essential to finding ourselves.

Newport calls it *digital minimalism,* whose central idea is very old: less can be more. The focus of our time online should be on a small, carefully selected number of activities that serve the things that really matter, and we should be willing to skip the rest.

We have overvalued connection at the expense of reflection. The innumerable times that we look at the smartphone screen every day and the countless hours that we dedicate to that and other screens all too often point to one reason: the fear of getting bored. In so many cases and so many times they have ceased to be an essential tool and have instead become an addiction. We must spend time alone again, recovering that sense of loneliness in which one thinks, feels, loves, and suffers. Everyone has to find their connection/disconnection ratio. We have become addicted to

[1] "Human beings are not wired to be constantly wired." J. Twenge (September 2017). "Have smartphones destroyed a generation?" *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com

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distraction. The internet is an irresistible temptation, therefore identifying and defending blocks of offline time is essential.

In short, it is about reconfiguring digital life and doing it from the ground up with better judgment, subjecting it to common sense, which is what brings us closer to the reality of who we are and what surrounds us. This will help us decide with judgment and act effectively, the central theme of this book, which we address next.

Risk and Uncertainty Never Go Away

"The certainty of prudence cannot be so great as to be devoid of all solicitude."

Thomas Aquinas

We are facing the hour, from now onward, looking to the future, although we understand it better framed in our personal narrative, which is born in the past. Actions define us. The future holds different possibilities, so grace lies in knowing how to look for what we want. It behooves us, however, to realize that it will only be true that good things will come if we succeed in what we do.

The pandemic has tested our ability to tolerate risk and uncertainty. The former provides contingency, i.e., the possibility of something happening or not. And additionally, this entails damage, e.g., to our health or for the economy. Uncertainty, although less aggressive, stings with its lack of certainty, which causes doubt or indecision.

Gerd Gigerenzer, director of the Harding Center for Risk Literacy at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, Germany, points to a practical distinction that is effective for our daily pursuits: "How should we make decisions when all the alternatives, consequences and probabilities are known?" To address this risk, he proposes using empirical evidence, which has been statistically refined. The more empirical evidence, the greater the statistical strength. However, the very serious game of life presents us with other genuine dilemmas, to which we must ask a slightly different, but essentially divergent, question: "How should we make decisions when all alternatives, consequences, and probabilities are not known?" This is the moment of glory for heuristics, that is, of inquiry, intuition or, in Gigerenzer's words, of *Bauchentscheidungen,* which is nothing more or less than seeing what comes out of one's gut feeling. The tool for risk is statistics, and for uncertainty, the gut or, in his case, the finger, a weather vane that points where the wind blows us.

The German psychologist identifies four guiding rules for our steps, depending on whether we find ourselves facing risk or uncertainty:

- A good decision in situations of risk may not be the best in contexts of uncertainty.
- Heuristic inquiry is essential for making good decisions in the face of uncertainty. It does not imply, however, a limitation on our intelligence.
- Complex problems may not require complicated solutions.
- More information, time, and calculations do not always lead to better decisions.

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