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In this new era, we are confronted with the simplicity and complexity of technology. In one hand, technology is utilized as a time saver, aiding in our abilities as one person to do many tasks. Yet with this freedom we find ourselves becoming trapped in a world of chaos and isolation causing a stress induced life. In his book *Hamlet's BlackBerry*, William Powers (2010) touches on our drive to be connected with society through social media websites, ultimately driving a wedge between our own self (mind) and those physically around us. In this paper we will discuss how history repeats itself utilizing the advice given by former advancers of technology to maintain balance in one's life and the struggles in doing so. One idea shared will be the importance of distancing oneself from technology while incorporating positive rituals to aid in a system of checks and balances. We will also discuss the impact technology had on the depth of learning as our society embeds technology into work, school and play, and where we can go from here.

People, who are inundated with the demands and over-connected aspects of technology in the Learning Society, should consider distance as an extremely desirable strategy for balance. William Powers described that humans have been trying to reduce distance since prehistoric times but now connectedness is so intense that it is disruptive and overwhelming (Powers, 2010). The Learning Society is accessible at our fingertips and is carried in our pockets through technology. While it is a remarkable thing, allowing some space opens up opportunity for reflection, introspection and connection to the physical world. If we allow gaps in digital connectedness, we can then return to our original work with more to offer. An idea or inspiration is more likely to develop through distance than from the fast-paced clamor of information that fills our in-boxes and our minds.

As described in *Hamlet's BlackBerry*, Johann Gutenberg made books available to more people via the printing press (Powers, 2010). Books, as a legitimate technology of the time, helped one connect with oneself allowing the imagination of an individual to soar. Now technology has evolved to an act of outward connectedness. As Powers described, the momentum of modern technology is in the opposite direction of books and leads to more group thinking (2010). Although inwardness may be found through written word or solitary work on devices, there is still an element of automatic connection. Our devices belong to a network that is never turned off and is always sharing information. Attempting to be inward with today's technology is counteractive as it is programmed to be outward. Updates and notifications are continuously popping up and soaring through the airwaves to reach their targets. As long as a device is nearby and turned on, inwardness will be interrupted. This creates a challenge for

the learning society as inwardness takes an individual beyond the surface-level and into deeper realms of concentration. This release from the crowd creates the space for ideas to arrive. Without this space from oneself and technology there is no room for inspiration. As said so well by William Powers (2010), “It’s all those unrealized epiphanies, insights and joys – journeys the mind and heart never get to take” (p. 104) due to the impact of technology.

Of the strategies that Powers suggests for finding balance in the digital age, we found that the implementation of positive rituals would be the most feasible for the learning society. With the advancement of technology we as learners cannot allow ourselves to become wholly absorbed into the device without a system of checks and balances to internally govern how this information is being absorbed, and then ultimately applied. This is particularly attainable because it focuses on the self. The individual is under their own control to make a thoughtful assessment of their behavior and evaluate why these actions may be detrimental to the learning process. Powers explains, “It’s about not just how but why” (Powers, 2010, p. 161). Through this reflection the individual can make the appropriate adjustments to their procedures which will ultimately change their behavior. Addressing this from an educational aspect, by governing our tendencies and interaction with technology and the avenues that we can access knowledge sources, the learner is provided the opportunity to focus the mind on a single task. “Our busyness doesn’t just take place in our minds, it’s our minds that orchestrate it and allow it to happen” (Powers, 2010, p. 73).

In contrast, while distance is the most desirable, we believe that this strategy is also the most unattainable within this day and age. Powers outlines for us the results of a connected society and how difficult it is for the individual to find distance, “The maximalist dogma is particularly difficult to challenge because it’s all about joining the crowd, so it’s self-reinforcing” (2010, p. 49). Just because we feel the need to disconnect and find distance to reflect on what we have learned does not mean that the world will stop and wait for us to return. It is our need to remain connected that keeps us from falling behind. Powers also gives thought to our relationship distance and just how ambiguous it’s attainability can be, “With connectedness approaching ubiquity, physical remoteness no longer ensures isolation” (2010, p. 64). So even as we seek distance with these technologies and how they impact our relationships and learning it is increasingly difficult to effectively disconnect.

What other effects has the digital age placed on us besides the inability to disconnect from digital machines. Well, when describing technology one may say that it is fast, resourceful, intense, convenient, and that its breadth allows us to connect to millions of people around the world. But rarely do words like profundity or intellectual depth come to mind. As William Powers mentions, the impact the digital age has had is our depth through all aspects of life: relationships, intellectual, and imaginative have been affected in some way. This affect in our opinion has that of great loss. The interaction with a computer

does not compare to physical interaction with people, material, or content. Relationships are a foundational component to learning and engaging in deeper thought. We acknowledge that technology has opened many doors for interactive engagement with new substances and people from around the world. Computers are being used to teach, grade, and generate knowledge in many fields of study. We do not deny the impact technology has had on society; however, we strongly feel that, currently, the depth of learning is suffering due to the chaotic lifestyle technology brings. It should be noted that the use of technology has greatly advanced our society in numerous ways. Technology is utilized now more than ever in classrooms from preschool to graduate level. But as Thomas Toch quotes Joel Rose, chief executive for human capital in the New York City school system in his article, *In an Era of Online Learning, Schools Still Matter*, “the best role of technology in the delivery of instruction is to ‘complement what live teachers do.’” (2010, p.73). The depth still lies within personal connection rather through a computer screen.

The use of technology in our lives is a crucial component to how we as people function and interact. The digital era has brought new opportunities and avenues of connection which can ultimately lead to technology overload if we are not careful. As Powers points out in his book, there are many avenues to maintain a balance of time for oneself (without the use of technology). One being, to find a way to disconnect with technology through turning off the internet, leaving your phones at home, or simply setting limits to how long you will use the internet. Sometimes disconnecting completely may be a last resort, as it is hard to do, but stepping away allows you to think more clearly and reconnect with oneself. Yes, technology has taken us to places we have never thought we could go, however it has also limited our abilities to interact with one another on a deeper level. The interactions we as humans thrive cannot be experienced solely through the computer screen. No, the depth of thinking has a limit when one engages in technology; this may be due to the busyness and chaos technology places in our lives hindering our thinking capacity or the lack of authentic relationships of materials and people due to artificial replacements. Whatever the reason may be, the digital era of today has created a society of instant gratification lacking both depth and the urge to disconnect from the grid.

References:

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