

Rushmore Ph.D. Capstone Paper

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It seems so long time ago that I started my Ph.D. at Rushmore University; even though it has only been 2½ years. The process has given me more than I would have dreamt of. In particular, the experiences I have had from communication with interesting people as well as the experiences from having a personal website have been rewarding. However, the experience I value the most is the general feeling of an appetite for new experiences which is fuelled by the global interconnectivity I have felt during these experiences; the clarity that we do indeed set our own limitations, and that our world is what we say it is.

Perhaps these words might sound big at first, and indeed they are; but in order to explain myself and their usage, let me recap step by step what happened:

The Initiation

The first thing that I experienced with Rushmore was a responsiveness that I had never experienced anywhere else in education or business. The timeframe from question to answer via email was simply impressive, moreover the communications was very personalized and it made me feel that I belonged right away. Such ability to come across via email is rare, as this is a very restrictive form of communication.

The first task was to build my own website. For me this was a fairly easy task, given my technical competency, but from a personal development standpoint the process was challenging. What would I tell the world? Exposing oneself globally from a computer was not an issue I had ever considered. But from the logic of what you give is what you get, I decided to share from the heart and write what was really on my mind; such a decision was totally contrary to my heritage from the Danish countryside but it is a decision I was never to regret, and which I will elaborate on later.

First articles; Book Reviews

I spent the first couple of months writing two book reviews: “Bill Gates - The Digital Author” and “Jakob Nielsen - The Guru of Web Page Usability”. Both reviews were recommended courses and in retrospect I am glad that I did take these rather small courses as they enabled me to learn the basics of literature review and research. Moreover, the limited scope of research allowed me to focus even more on my writing skills with the kind help of Rushmore editors. Another thing that I know about my personality is that I do not enjoy being at the starting point, so making two relatively “quick wins” got me into the process.

The Consequence Published

Most importantly, my first article about Bill Gates was published in “Information-Knowledge-Systems Management”, Volume 3, February 2002. From this point I called myself an author; but this interesting thought is why didn't I do that before? Wouldn't I be just as much an author by simply writing an article that did not get published....? Even more thought-provoking for me was the fact that I was now published in a journal on an entirely different continent. This experience made me realize just how small the world is

because of the Internet. Considering these things prompted me to make an Internet experiment: “The Virtual Earth Tour”.

The Virtual Earth Tour was a project that was undertaken by a band I had; it consisted of me, with a few of my friends. We had been having a lot of fun for a while, making rap music, a discipline in which I was a novice but fortunately I had some talented friends. Over the years we managed to make a few songs and my idea was that we would take them onto the Internet, without any specific aim of making a profit, and simply see how far around the globe we could get people to listen. We were not disappointed! It was amazing how much help and encouragement we got from people on the Internet; some played our songs on the radio, and others helped to spread the word. A year later our music had been played in 50 different countries, including radio stations in 13 of them. Most remarkably, we managed to become “Band of the Week” at Vibe Lebanon in Beirut.

Such an experience was, to my mind, astonishing when one considers the number of talented musicians who never make it outside the city limits. I hope the Virtual Earth Tour inspires some of the people with much more talent than us to use such testimony and make themselves heard around the globe. For me it was amazing to experience what could be achieved through the Internet; I learned that the Internet is not a technology – it is an interconnection of human thought.

In the Name of Science

The next articles I wrote were all research projects. The first project “Mind and Management - The Other 90%” was based on literature research whereas the following “Meeting the Needs of the Web User”, “Business Analytics - From Chosen Few to Common World View” and “Management by Stars” all involved either survey or interviews.

These projects were real science, in my mind, and I found a lot of motivation in establishing a state of the art platform from which I would seek to take the next step. To me this was true work in the name of science; it was a feeling of pioneering. At the same time, identifying the current knowledge in a field made me expand my knowledge horizon.

During these research projects I familiarized myself with analytical methods such as conjoint analysis, perceptual mapping, multi-variate regression analysis as well as developed my own datamining algorithm. This was a true learning experience; having computers assist in new ways of analyzing data other than those I have been accustomed to while developing analytical applications for business. The familiarization with such methods and others led to both new development initiatives as well as patents for TARGIT, the company where I work.

However, the most important scientific experience I had was when Pat taught me not to segment data too early in a process; one should explore the data to see what patterns emerge and from this understanding, name the patterns in the data fabric. Coming from a field that I later found a word for – “Information Farming” – this was both new as well as awkward in terms of developing automated computer systems. However, we now have a project named “Exploratory Analysis”, which covers the ability to make such an analysis, in the current project plans in my company.

In general, I had a lot of inspirational encounters with different people during interviews and feedback on the research. During this journey I would label myself a scientist more than anything else.

Meeting with Pat

During my Ph.D. course I have had the good fortune to meet with Pat Robinson a few times. These meetings were generously arranged by Pat whenever he was in Denmark. It is hard to describe the true value of these meetings since they were rewarding in so many ways: these meetings helped gave me scientific guidance, they gave me inspiration as well as confidence, but most of all they gave me a friend from whom I felt that I could learn a lot about life in general.

During meetings in Copenhagen as well as on a trip to the northern part of Denmark we discussed issues ranging from pure mathematics over game theory to the human mind. As always, these meetings sent me back to my study with new notes, literature references and usually insight from Pat who had actually been doing much pioneering research ahead of its time. I think the best way to describe the nature of these meetings from my perspective is synergy.

Pat also ignited my interest in nano-technology by persistently mentioning its technological perspectives; he also revived my old interest in seeking to build computerized Artificial Intelligence with human capacity.

CALM in the Future

Having written the articles that accounted for half of the Ph.D. credits, it was time to realize one of my personal goals and dreams: writing a book. This dream was actually one of my primary reasons for selecting Rushmore University.

The literature research phase took a lot longer than I anticipated; it felt as if the books I read kept referring to other books. I decided to combine both structured referencing as well as intuition in the scoping of my literature research. In other words, I would of course go with the obvious literature of choice, but I was very open to whatever literature “came to me” as well. This means that whenever I heard the name of a book three times from different parties or I found a book which seemed interesting in that moment, I would read it as well. By using this approach I also found that the initial structure of the book would change gradually; however the most challenging part of this process was how to keep up with my notes, which accumulated as I covered 75 pieces of literature in addition to those mandatory in the Rushmore program.

Once again the Internet came to my attention as a solution. Based on my research for the two articles on Web Usability, I had already made sure that by website was optimized for search included a site-specific search engine. Therefore when I turned to writing and needed my notes, I found that I could use a lot of what I had already written, at least for inspiration. However, if I were to do it again I would include page numbers on my reading notes; this would have saved me a lot of work in citing the references during the book.

The process of writing the book took on a life of its own. The initial skeleton of chapters and references changed, and sometimes it felt as if my hands were just writing on pure

inspiration. During these times readjustment was needed to ensure the overall flow of thought, however the benefit of those times is that the writing itself became much more alive, in the sense that it came from both the heart and the head.

One of the truly interesting consequences of unexpected things happening during my writing was when I wrote about parachuting experiences I had had when I was eighteen years old. During a trip across the country it suddenly struck me that I needed to do it again. I pursued this thought and found an entirely new dimension in my life as I worked with it. A process which I perceived as conquering one's fear suddenly turned to fun and comfort, and the experimentation with the stages in this process overall gave me a lot of inspiration for the entire concept of fear and stress in both individuals and organizations. At the point of writing this I am now a certified skydiver and am about to buy my own parachute; if anyone had asked me of this possibility six months ago I would have found it quite improbable.

To be honest, when I came up with the title "CALM in the Future" in the planning of my curriculum when I began my Ph.D., I thought it would be about business intelligence. Specifically, I thought it would be about how leaders and managers could benefit from improvements in analysis of organizational data in the future. The book turned out to be about a much broader aspect of both leadership and management, namely how to unleash the full potential of individuals and organizations. I owe this broadening of my perspective as well as the formulation of the CALM concept to the Ph.D. process, and hopefully readers of my book will also like it.

Getting Feedback

During the Ph.D. course I have received regular feedback from people around the world through my personal website. I have been asked for my opinion of Rushmore as well as on Business Intelligence and the IT industry in general. I have enjoyed all of these short conversations with people that I would never have met otherwise. I particularly enjoyed the occasion when bestselling author Peter Urs Bender contacted me and said he like what I had written about his books; he asked me for my private address and sent me four signed copies of his work. It is hard to describe the motivational effect of such happenings other than: WOW!

The process of getting feedback was particularly valuable to me when I was writing my book: it was the fuel that kept me going through the hard and frustrating times when inspiration just didn't hit me. The kind help I received from friends who voluntarily read through the very rough manuscript to assist in creating flow and making it worth reading was simply invaluable.

In particular I have had a truly remarkable connection and synergy with Rushmore's editor, Laurel Barley, who not only did an excellent job of editing my book as well as articles, but was very encouraging and inspiring with regards to the content which appears to be within her area of expertise as well. The encounter with Laurel has made me want to see New Zealand. I imagine if people are as open minded and positive as Laurel it would be a nice place to experience.

In Conclusion

So in summary, the Ph.D. has taught me a lot of things with regards to research of both literature and numbers. When I started the process I had expected to acquire these skills, but they were exceeded by far by the actual result. However, I find it really amazing to note what other things I have gained from the process.

The experiences with the Internet have given me an entirely new appetite for exploring global possibilities and have taught me that the potential of this medium has not been reached. We are but at an early stage of global electronic telepathy which, over time, will strengthen understanding as well as opportunities throughout the world.

The research into the human mind has given me ideas for pursuing entirely new concepts of computer interaction. The potential for computer applications in this field has so far barely been touched upon and there is enormous room for improvement, yet before commencing the Ph.D. course I was not truly aware of its existence. In general, my positive attitude towards the perspectives of Artificial Intelligence has been revived. I never lost the faith, but I have tended to be less pioneering in commercial applications. This in itself has already changed, and new patents and projects are on the way.

I recall my personal conversation with Dr. Michael Cox from Rushmore when I was signing up for the Ph.D., and I guess my concern at the time was primarily the credentials of the university and whether the fully virtual approach to education would work. As Dr. Cox pointed out to me, the question was really about the credibility of the faculty which in my personal opinion is indisputable, but first and foremost a Ph.D. is a personal process so the benefits reside in oneself, waiting to be unleashed. Today I would say I agree, much as I said on that day, but today I would say in addition that I understand....