

From Point to Process: A Changing Perception of Growth

Personal growth refers to an individual gaining deeper awareness of the self through insights about behaviour, values, attitudes, actions and other personal traits. It is often intuitive to think about causes of growth as points – singular events and choices that supposedly ‘shape’ you. The idea is even more intuitive to a near-university graduate who has made life-changing decisions like moving abroad for university or joining an extracurricular which greatly enriched university life. However, one must question whether growth is a direct consequence of the point, or of the *continuous experiences that follow the point*. This essay talks about my changing perception of the causes of growth from points to processes – where *growth occurs over a period* through experiences that might or might not be a consequence of the point. It first explains the intuitive appeal of seeing growth as caused by points, and why processes better characterise causes of growth instead. It then discusses shortcomings of viewing growth as being caused by points, such as immoderate focus on finding the right point rather than engaging in experiences, and expectation of instant rewards. The essay concludes by incorporating both points and processes, and explains how that can enable one to pursue experiences that lead to the most growth.

What Learning Is

- Instrumental vs intrinsic
 - Instrumental is cost-benefit analysis and outcomes-based, whereas intrinsic is based on the idea of learning for its own sake
- Key highlights
 - Choosing to come to SG for schooling
 - Unconventional, but I just wanted to have a more holistic education
 - Choosing to study in NUS
 - Understanding mental models of people with different backgrounds helps you approach everyone with a position of acceptance
 - Joining USP
 - Understanding that disciplines form a part of the picture – using particular tools requires understanding the environment which just CS cannot help with
- Insights from different groups
 - Enlightenment of some form as a highlight
 - Breaking out of a mould; resistance
 - Big questions which are supposed to drive your decisions, but you never get time to reflect on
 - Intrinsic value of learning; change; deciding to put effort into things
 - Change and recency effect; more agency in recent times
 - Knowledge sets being updated
 - Organised scepticism
- Process of reflection

Reflect on the 3 key educational highlights

Box 1

The experiences I picked are decisions, and **I did not grow as a result of those but as a result of the consequences of those decisions. In that case, a proper reflection will not consist of those experiences itself – since they are triggers to more experiences.**

- A good reflection will **consider key experiences which directly shaped me**, like organising something as part of NUS Hackers or taking a module in USP, or having a particular conversation with a friend. These are more specific, directly led to new insights, and will find themselves being fleshed out more in a reflection

Box 2

New list of potential highlights

- One of the many conversations with Larry, and how that reflects differences in our mental models
- Designing a judging algorithm for H&R, as an example of how technology can directly solve real, immediate problems and that is what gets me going
- Getting to do research under Seth and Shenggui, and what I can learn from the spirit of research that is transferable (at the same time realising that academia is probably not for me)
- My mentorship experiences, from Project Intern to USP Peer Mentorship, and how that led to me realising that I really like talking to people and helping them with tough decisions
- Reading *Poor Economics*, and how that led to a wealth of insights and problem realisations, and how that led me to understand that I want to work to help and empower people who need it more than other sections of society

Fig. 1 (a) and (b): Notes from USR talking about educational highlights

Although it is intuitive to think of important decisions as points causing growth, growth is often caused by processes following the points. Decision points often tend to overcome a notable dilemma – such as choosing a university or moving countries. Like a fork in a metaphorical road, life would be very different if the decision turned out differently, making the point stand out in a person’s memory of the growth journey. Additionally, the point leads to various experiences which are the ones actually causing growth. These experiences can be disconnected save for the triggering point which remains a common link, and becomes an easy way to encompass the different experiences. Fig. 1(a) refers to my notes on key educational highlights discussed in USR, which I shared with my mirror group as causing growth. Here, I refer to different points as highlights, such as “joining USP” or “choosing to come to Singapore”. I do so because these were crucial decisions in my educational journey and were “triggers to more [valuable] experiences” (Fig. 1(b), box 1). However, the point itself does not contribute anything to growth. Either the point leads to more experiences causing growth, or growth is caused by reflecting actively on point-like happenings (like important decisions) – both possibilities are better characterised as processes. Dewey and Kolb’s takes on learning emphasise the nature of growth as processes. Central to Dewey’s notion of learning is “the concept of continuity”, which means learning is a *continuous process* rather than an isolated point. Moreover, both Dewey and Kolb emphasise the cyclical nature of growth, where the “cycle of growth... results from two-way interactions”, indicating that a static point is insufficient to characterise growth (Rodgers). As highlighted in box 2 of Fig. 1(b), I formulated an updated list of educational highlights in the next class (after reading Dewey and Kolb’s ideas). The new highlights are akin to continuous processes, such as having conversations, doing research or reading a book – all of which stretch over a period of time. Beyond inaccurate characterisation, looking at growth as caused by points makes one susceptible to pitfalls which actually hinder growth.

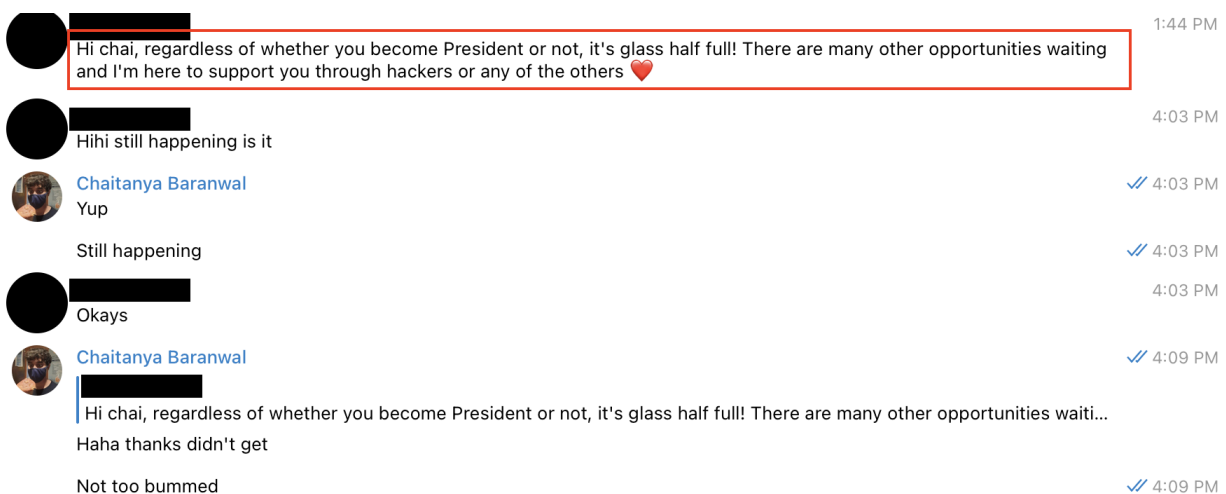


Fig. 2: Conversation about being “bummed” on not being elected President for NUS Hackers

Aim

Recruiting is hard. A bad hire can cause the failure of an organisation, while a good hire can contribute immensely to the organisation's success. This document aims to improve our recruiting evaluation metrics and make them 'formula' based rather than 'intuition' based. This guards against certain cognitive biases described by [Daniel Kahneman](#), a summary of which can be found [here](#).

Idea

1. Define metrics to evaluate candidates based on.
2. Assign the candidate a score for every metric, on a scale of 1-5.
3. Sum up to get the final score (more complicated formulae are possible, but [research](#) has found that even simple formulae work well).
4. Kahneman found that intuition works well [after](#) a person has painstakingly evaluated and scored candidates on the different metrics. So, at the end of the interview, the interviewer can close their eyes and then assign a score purely based on feeling (we can call this **overall enthusiasm**), on the scale of 1-5. We can view [this](#) answering the question: **How enthusiastic would you be about hiring the person?** This will then be added to the total in step 3.

I also suggest including a write-up for each section indicating why the interviewer assigned a particular score in the interview feedback.

Proposal to recruit people on semester 2 only.

(consider H&R quota instead)

So I (Herbert) has been interviewing 6 out of 13 candidates this semester (AY19/20 Sem 1) and I can't help but notice a general trend, which I believe some of you can notice as well: the people who seem to perform well on our interviews are typically

- year 1
- who has known our events for quite some time before uni.

So I think that's personally fine. But we (consciously / unconsciously) take batch quota into consideration. And because of that, since naturally there are more people who apply on sem 1, a lot of these **quota** are given out in sem 1. This leads us into setting a higher bar on people who apply on sem 2, and hence, biasing against them. In particular, I feel that we are biasing against:

- people who only know on Hackers when they enter NUS
- people who are still not very sure what their priorities are
- international students who are still trying to assimilate with NUS / Singapore culture

I think it is important to always have people who are of these backgrounds above.

- It's important to have people who only know of us in NUS. It allows us to **understand** **better** the perspectives of someone who only **discover** hacker culture in uni. After all, if we want to spread hacker culture, it is the kind of people like them who we are targeting
- People who are initially not very sure what their priorities are, and finally **decided** to join Hackers, generally has a stronger reason to join.
- And in general it is always good to have people from different nationalities, so that we can understand their perspectives better.

If I may bring a personal anecdote: I applied to coreteam on year 2 sem 1, and only because Advay told me that Hackers is a good place. Throughout the entirety of year 1 I am not sure of my priorities (I generally join CCAs like 1 day before closing kind of thing), and as an Indonesian I still have the mindset that my studies are important. Only in year 2 sem 1, when I start going to Friday Hacks, do I start to understand more of this hacker culture and NUS Hackers in general. And since I know that the mission resonates with myself, I become very enthusiastic in joining Hackers. But with this mindset, I would not really be a good fit for the organisation.

Fig. 3: Major organisational proposals by non-president members of NUS Hackers

A pitfall of looking at growth as being caused by points, rather than processes, is *too much focus on finding a single point*, and *not enough focus on engaging in growth-inducing experiences that follow*. A person who does that would spend so much effort working towards that point, that they lose sight of *why* achieving the point matters for growth. This undue focus on reaching a point was highlighted to me by members of NUS Hackers, a student organisation I am part of. At some point, I was very focused on wanting to be president of the organisation, which I believed would inevitably bring leadership experiences. Consequently, I was dejected when that did not work out, and in Fig. 2, my friend consoled me by saying that “there are many other opportunities waiting”. Over time, however, I noticed that certain non-president members would often propose major organisational changes and be more vocal about issues than the president himself. Fig. 3 highlights two such proposals – both of which are related to major organisational changes in recruiting, and exude confidence in tone and articulation. Observing them illuminated that I had been too focused on being the president. I should focus on growth-inducing processes I expected to do after being president – such as mentoring new members, or improving organisational processes – and do them regardless. I eventually did undertake such initiatives which helped both the organisation and myself grow. Thinking about growth as being caused by processes would have ensured that I focused on these experiences rather than focusing on becoming president and feeling disempowered when I did not achieve this point.

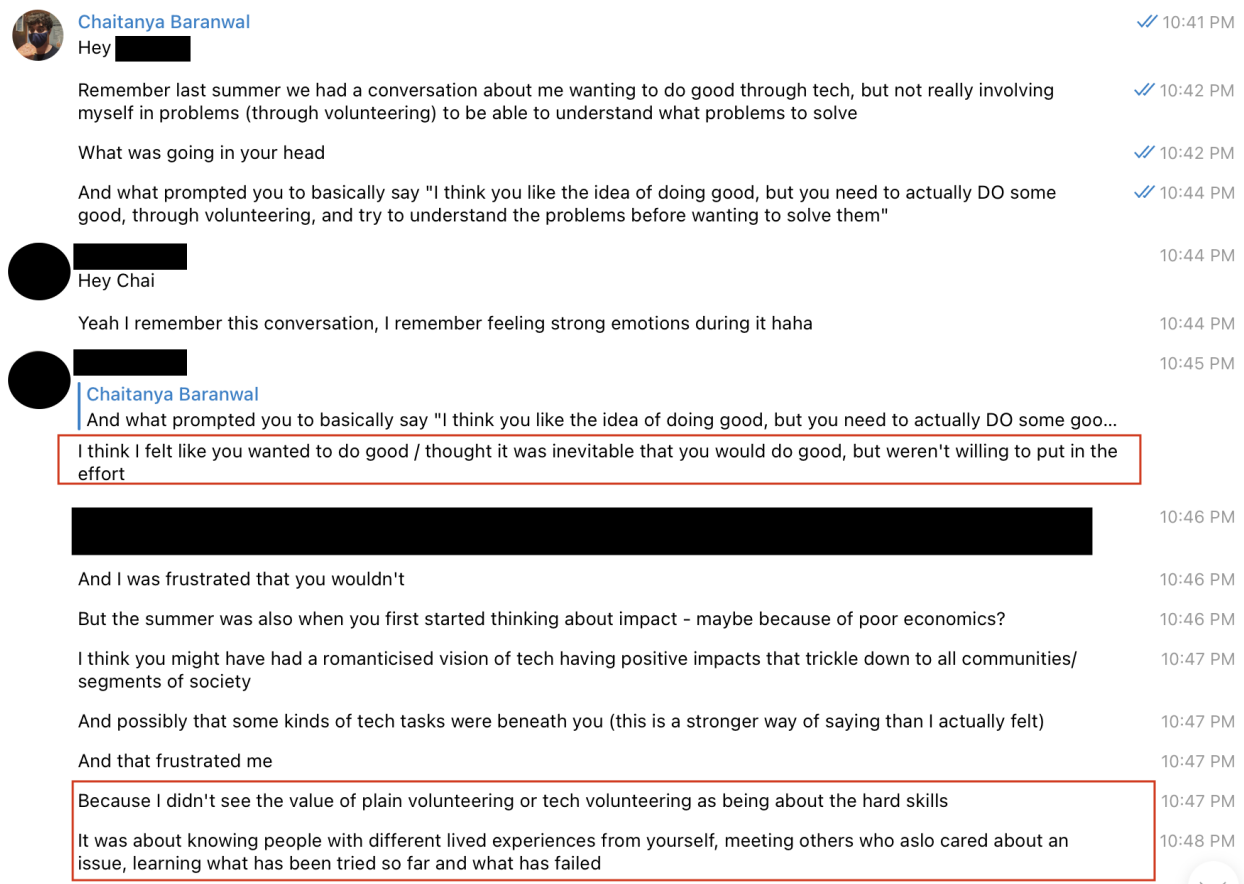


Fig. 4: Conversation to determine if volunteering is something I am passionate about

Another issue of perceiving growth as caused by points is an expectation of instant rewards, whereas processes suggest that work is required after reaching a point. For me, this learning came through realising the difference between ‘finding one’s passion’ and ‘developing one’s passion’. The idea of finding passion is “limiting, leading us to think of passion as something we happen upon”, when in fact it “takes time to develop passion” (Jachimowicz) – the same goes for growth, since developing passion is a form of personal growth. Fig. 4 mentions a Telegram conversation where my friend was frustrated that despite talking about social impact, I was not willing to get involved in volunteering, which would help me understand *how* I want to make social impact. I was uncertain about volunteering for a specific cause because I did not feel in my gut that it was ‘my passion’, even though I saw the value. Here, I was thinking about growth (or discovering passion) as a fixed point I could find. Unlike me, however, my friend believed that I cannot judge whether I would like volunteering *before actually being involved with it for some time*. I would realise if a cause resonated with me only by “knowing people with different lived experiences” and “understanding what has been tried so far and what has failed”. Over time, I *might* develop a passion in the area, but I certainly could not make any claim before immersing myself. The conversation made me re-evaluate how I thought about growth and passion, and I

created a Google Sheet of tech-related social good organisations that I found and emailed, in the hopes of getting to volunteer with them. Looking at growth as caused by processes over time led to the insight that growth needs work, and I should neither have misplaced expectations about sudden growth nor miss out on opportunities where growth comes through consistent effort.

This essay talks about my changing perception of what causes growth – from point-like happenings to processes drawn over a period. These processes might be a consequence of point-like decisions, separate experiences that drive the same learning, or the act of reflection – but the core idea is they happen over a period unlike the momentary nature of points and could be unrelated to the point itself. This is not to reduce the importance of points in a person's growth journey – points are still “triggers to more experiences”, and even though not leading to instant rewards, they set up a foundation for the future experiences that an individual can gain rewards from. Individuals just need to be careful to not focus too much on only points and lose sight of the processes involved. Rather than point versus process, the best model for growth is probably *a cycle* – where growth processes, triggered by points, inform and shape the points that are encountered in the future. Such a model keeps its focus on processes as causing growth, while acknowledging that points can be the trigger to enriching processes. In fact, it is the closest to Dewey and Kolb's models, in which “interactions between the self, others, and one's environment... serves as the next experience from which learning can continue” (Rodgers), thereby helping pursue experiences that lead to the most growth.

Total words: 1430

Bibliography

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