A Year-Long Leave of Absence from University

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Contents

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1 Introduction

1.1 Brief Relevant History

During my Junior College days, I could not solve the dilemma of trying to allocate time, energy and resources to both formal and informal education. While in National Service, I read up a little on research, practices and thought in the fields of Psychology and Education.

From then, I started to realise that the natural learning processes were unfortunately hampered in many ways in schooling, due to the need for organisation and control. Having authoritative sources behind me, I started taking my informal learning more seriously. After more reading and experimentation with self-directed learning, I came up with a possible solution to my dilemma. This plan is a step towards that possible solution.

1.2 The Long-term Solution

Bring both formal and informal education under the same umbrella, **by directing my own education**. This is done so they can be made to compliment one another, and allow for better allocation of time, energy and resources.

1.3 The Intermediate Steps

Becoming able to direct one's own education is no small feat. However, I believe that I can enable myself to be able to do so, by achieving a few intermediate steps:

- Making self-directed learning a well assimilated habit in my daily life

- Improving my knowledge in vital areas

- Building structure and credibility in my informal education

1.4 My Current Goal

Make self-directed learning a well assimilated **habit in my daily life**, over a period of one year.

1.5 My Current Plan

Continue self-directed learning,

- Guided by an extensible framework (structure)

- Over an extended period of time (one year)

with special emphasis on making it a habit in my daily life.

2 The Framework

2.1 Ad-hoc Interests

These are the questions, thoughts, ideas, etc. that come to everyone from time to time but are rarely followed upon. I however, use these ad-hoc interests as the sparks and fuel for my self-directed learning.

2.2 Learning Projects

These Projects are how my learning will be organised. They are derived from my ad-hoc interests. Attention is given to both the learning process and its creations and outcomes.

2.3 Record Keeping

Records of ad-hoc interests and learning projects are kept. In particular, the inspirations, aims, resources, directions and investigative trails are documented. Records help in subsequent reflection and evaluation, and form the initial step in building credibility.

2.4 Improving Learning Skills and Resources

The self-directed nature of my learning warrants special attention towards improving my learning skills and resources. The current push is to link up with people, so as to enhance my learning.

3 What I Have Done So Far

3.1 Before Entering University

Before entering university, I have done six months of full-time self-directed learning. In this time, I

- Started keeping records of my learning and investigative processes

- Came up with a default method of learning

- Started off several learning projects, and

- Set up the beginnings of the framework

The result: I got a feeling of fulfillment and managed to widen my internal locus of control. This resulted in me becoming more motivated and determined as I saw that many of the things I do are self-chosen; and not forced onto me.

3.2 After Entering University

After entering university, while concentrating on my university course and vacation work and travel programme, I

- Continued my self-directed learning pursuit (at a slower pace)

- Documented my methods, practices, inspirations, etc

- Brushed up on the framework and default method of learning

- Experimented on ways and means to explain what I was doing to others

The result: This was when I formulated bringing both formal and informal education under one umbrella, and directing my own education. This was also when I realised that a key step along the way was to assimilate self-directed learning into my daily life.

4 What I Intend to Learn Next

What I intend to learn next is somewhat similar to what may be covered in a Liberal Arts Education. However, I will not have readily available professors to guide me—I will instead be seeking the resources and guidance myself. While reading further, keep in mind that the following are the result of my ad-hoc interests.

4.1 Human Nature and Psychology

Having learnt introductory psychology, I intend to delve a little into social psychology, possibly both from a psychologist's and a sociologist's viewpoint.

4.2 Money Supply and the Capitalist Economy

Knowing exactly how our currencies originated and how they work has always been a wish of mine. I will be largely focusing on historical and empirical aspects, while learning the required theories as and when I need them. I intend to also constantly consult experts in the field and my friends who are more knowledgeable than me. Towards the end, I expect to have a foundation in macroeconomics while learning the necessary microeconomic theories along the way.

4.3 Sales, Marketing, Business, Finance and Logistics

I intend to get a overview on the content and knowledge gained by students in the above fields. I mainly want to be able to understand the basic lingo used in these fields and be able to strike a conversation about these topics. Also, I would be focusing on seeing the links between the above fields and the knowledge that I have already gained thus far (e.g. in the sciences). It is likely that I will be mainly involved with introductory textbooks and students in these fields.

4.4 Basic Law in Singapore

Having realised the significance of the Constitution through my self-directed learning, I intend to commit some of its clauses to memory. I also intend to get an overview of Singapore Law in the fields that are of interest to me.

4.5 Nutrition and the Half-an-Hour Meal

I am considering stopping eating meats and seafood that have been mass produced by the industry due to my suspicions about their feed, rearing methods and state of health when slaughtered. I intend to instead eat more from lower down the food-chain so as to minimize possible adverse health effects. Also, I want to investigate on my suspicions

and learn more about vegetarianism while changing my diet slowly. Part of this will be to practice cooking meals for myself within half an hour.

4.6   Exercise as a Daily Habit

Currently, I know several exercises that can be done without going to a gym, that stretch and work out every major muscle group in the body. I intend to organise these exercises together into a form that can be done as a daily habit and assimilate them into my daily life. I also intend to learn more from experienced personal trainers and read up about the bio-mechanics and physiology behind these exercises.

4.7   Inline Skating Proficiency and Instruction

An example of the diverse range of topics I intend to cover, skating proficiency requires understanding of theory and methods and putting them into practice. I also intend to be trained as an instructor.

4.8   Videography

Videos play a huge role in the mass media. I intend to learn what it takes to film and edit videos of reasonable quality to add to the skills I have.

5   Frequently Asked Questions

5.1   How will I be learning?

I term the default learning method the Web Crawler Analogy (see Figure 1). Basically, initial resources are searched for or sought through recommendations. The resources after the initial ones are sought mainly from links, references and bibliographies within the initial resources itself. Records are kept and additional searches are made if necessary. Knowledge gained is merged with existing knowledge. The process then continues, being modified in response to changes in my learning direction.

5.2   Why one year?

I expect my efforts to reach a peak after the duration of about a semester. One semester is too short a time for my goal. One year is just nice as after the mid-point where efforts reach a peak, they can be slowed down and experience in managing reactions to additional pursuits and change of situations can be gained. I do not want things to suddenly come crashing down, which is what would happen if I re-enter university pre-maturely. Also, one year is chosen so as to stay in sync with the next batch in my course.

5.3   Why now? Why not after my course?

Now is the best compromise. Considering my age and the fact that this is still an experiment, it is better to do this before as early as possible, before I am burdened with the necessity to repay back my tuition fee loans. Also, this plan will help me better focus on my university course itself and make better use of the university resources when I return.
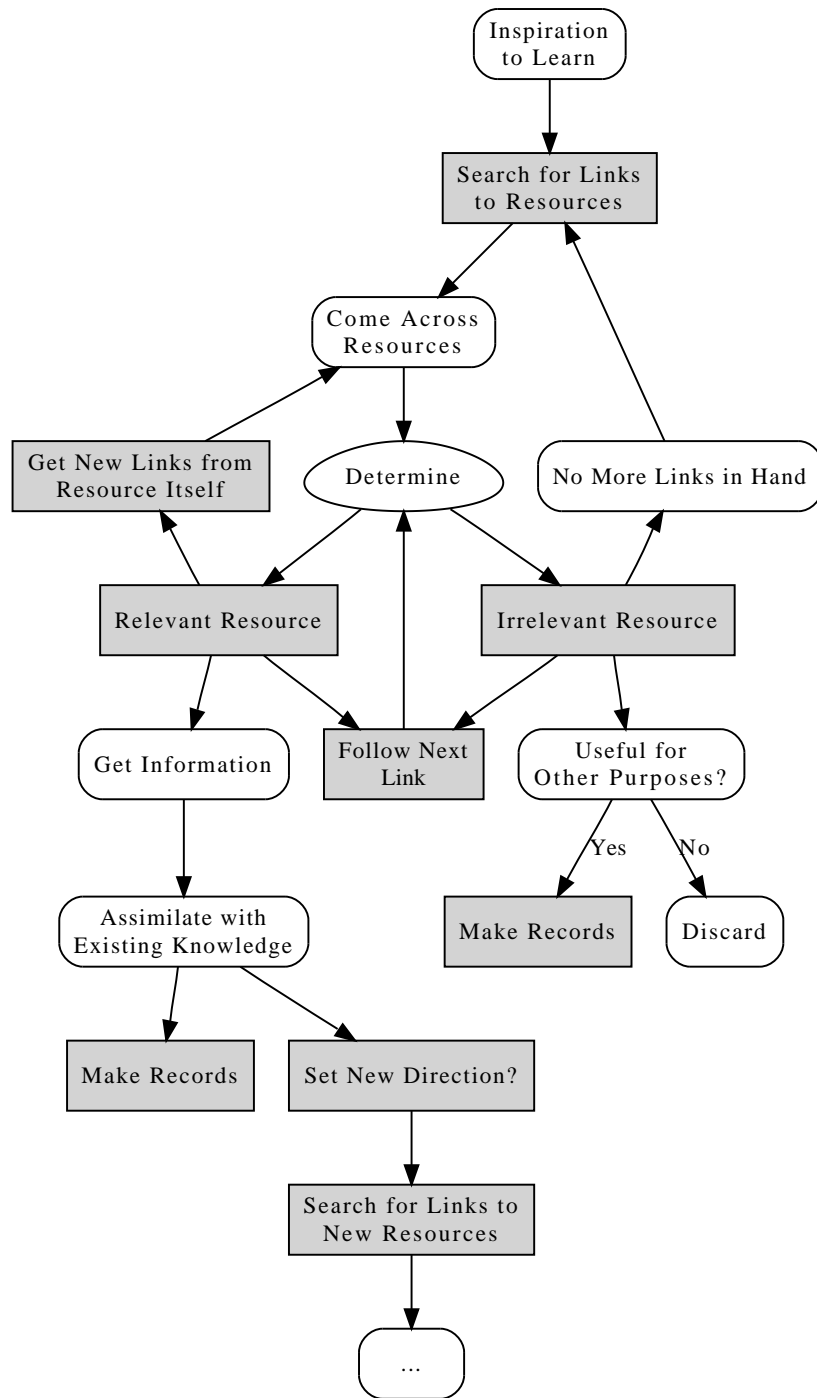
Figure 1: Learning using the web-crawler analogy. Key points are highlighted in grey.

5.4 Would I have trouble when I re-enter my course?

I do not expect to have much trouble readjusting mainly because I will not have stopped the process of learning and acquiring knowledge throughout the year. Also, the fact that I did not have much trouble adjusting to university life in my first year gives me further confidence that it will not be a problem.

6 Conclusion

Having gained knowledge from several months of self-directed learning, I came up with an experimental solution to my dilemma regrading allocation of time, energy and resources to both formal and informal education—bring both types of education under the same umbrella. This requires me to be able to direct my own education, and making self-directed learning a habit that is well assimilated into my daily life is a vital step towards being able to do so.

While assimilating self-directed learning into my daily life, I will be learning subjects that are similar those in a liberal arts education, from a variety of sources and people. I will also be guiding myself through use of the framework that is in place for self-directed learning. Though I still classify this as an experiment, I am confident that my efforts and experience gained over the next year will be beneficial, both to me and in areas beyond just myself.