From Information to Wisdom

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ABSTRACT: The volume of available information is growing exponentially. It has become an explosion. Yet, most people are more isolated, frustrated and unhappy. How can this ocean of information be useful and meaningful to the third milennium of people? One of the answers to this question is the thesis of this article. *Relationships* in smaller communities, small groups, where people are connected and information is shared. In this context information can be turned into knowledge and knowledge can be turned into wisdom.
KEY WORDS: Information, knowledge, community, small groups, wisdom.

Information, knowledge and wisdom are three words that are used interchangebly. Even though knowledge is defined as "understanding of or information about a subject that you get by experience or study, either known by one person or by people generally,"[1] I would make a distinction between information and knowledge. Information is a volume of data available to be known. Knowledge is more than understanding data, it is the ability to operate with knowledge at the theoretical level. At the end of the road is wisdom, the internalization of the information and the ability to use it in a decision making process that can change someone's life.

Theologically speaking, we have in the Bible the example of Old Testament people of God, Israel. They received all needed information in the Law. Daily they were taught at home. Weekly they experienced teaching at the synagogues and three times a year

at the Temple. Yet, with all this spiritual, ethical information it was still only head knowledge. At a certain point even God complained through the prophet Hosea: "Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel! The LORD has brought charges against you, saying: 'There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land.'"[2] The knowledge of the Lord involved the heart, not just the head. Wisdom is what king Solomon asked from God, and it was given to him. That quality set him above all others in his time; giving him a special insight that helped him make difficult decisions. This remains the needed goal for today.

Information Explosion

The history of information is amazing. Researchers as well as institutions have studied this subject. Here are some findings.

Brett King in his article *Too Much Content: A World of Exponential Information Growth*, cited Google CEO Eric Schmidt, who said: "Between the birth of the world and 2003, there were five exabytes of information created. We [now] create five exabytes every two days."[3]

Buckminster Fuller created the "Knowledge Doubling Curve"; he noticed that until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every century. By the end of World War II knowledge was doubling every 25 years. Today things are not as simple as different types of knowledge have different rates of growth. For example, nanotechnology is doubling every two years and clinical knowledge every 18 months. But on average human knowledge is doubling every 13 months. According to IBM, the build out of the "internet of things" will lead to the doubling of knowledge every 12 hours.[4]

Susan Gunelius in her article *The Data Explosion in 2014 Minute by Minute—Infographic,* stated that: "In 2012, DOMO created an infographic that showed how much data is generated every minute, and in 2014, the *Data Never Sleeps 2.0* infographic was published with all of the latest stats. . . . Below are some key pieces of data that might surprise you.

Every minute:
- Facebook users share nearly 2.5 million pieces of content.
- Twitter users tweet nearly 300,000 times.
- Instagram users post nearly 220,000 new photos.
- YouTube users upload 72 hours of new video content.
- Apple users download nearly 50,000 apps.
- Email users send over 200 million messages.
- Amazon generates over $80,000 in online sales."[5]

These figures are beyond any imagination or prediction. The future is easier to be understood from our time. William Koff,[6] and Paul Gustafson[7], in a study called *Data rEvolution*, explains that "Whereas in the past data was primarily generated in enterprise systems, today's data comes from many additional sources: social networks, blogs, chat rooms, product review sites, communities, web pages, email, documents, images, videos, music and sensors. It is often chaotic—unstructured—and doesn't fit neatly into the orderly—structured—world of the past. . . . The Data rEvolution is both a revolution and an evolution. The revolution lies in: new kinds of data, both people–generated and machine generated (e.g., consumer data, query data, sensor data, actuator data), massive amounts of data, complexity of data, diversity of data, new ways to organize and manage the data for rapid processing, new tools for gleaning insights from the data, new linkages, data opening up for more widespread analysis, use and experimentation. The evolution lies in the steady advances of the technology base itself—compute and storage platforms, applications, architectures, and the communication networks that tie everything together."[8]

People of today are invaded with loads of information. Brett King in his article *Too Much Content: A World of Exponential Information Growth*, cited William Dudley, *Sybase 365:* "All of this talk about trillions got me thinking how much is 1 trillion? 1 trillion seconds = 32,000 years. Another way of looking at 1 trillion is that 1 trillion SMS messages are approximately 32,000 messages per second for every second of 1 year. And the world is up to just over 3 trillion for the 1st half of 2010."[9] There are many different measures of this phenomenon. IDC predicts that the digital universe will be

44 times bigger in 2020 than it was in 2009, totaling a staggering 35 zeta–bytes (1 zeta–byte = 1.000.000.000.000.000.000.000 bytes).[10] EMC reports that the number of customers storing a peta–byte or more of data will grow from 1,000 (reached in 2010) to 100,000 before the end of the decade. . . .[11] In 2010 Gartner reported that enterprise data growth will be 650 percent over the next five years, and that 80 percent of that will be unstructured.[12]

The Results of Information Explosion

This is what is happening and what is going to happen with the information. But what is happening with us? Are we more knowledgable than before? Are we wiser? Do we have better relationships? Are we happier?

Information Overload

The first answer is "NO." We are not wiser! We have more information, but less wisdom. Information is to be used in day by day life. Ken Blanchard believes that "true learning involves a change in your behaviour. In fact… learning is a journey from knowing to doing."[13] Why is it that with such a flood of information, even knowledge, people know less? Ken studied the phenomenon and found out that people don't learn and start doing what they know because of what he called "information overload". People read something and jump to the next book, the next article, the next CD. Information is available, but "information overload" leads to some real problems. It immobilizes us. . . . When we expose ourselves to new knowledge all the time with no pause for integrating our new know–how and put it into action . . . we become brain cluttered. This is why so many people are drowning in a sea of information."[14]

Lack of Character

The answer to our second question is "NO." We do not have better relationships, we do not treat other human beings with due respect. With all the knowledge we possess there should be a great progress in behaviour, in relationships, in character. We are more

sophisticated than any other generation, still, our character and our way of treating others does not keep pace with knowledge.

Dallas Willard presents the drama that took place in academic circles, especially in the most prestigious universities. He cites Derek Bok, president of Harvard University who identified a change in the academic approach. In other days, Bok pointed out "the instructor's aim was . . . to foster a belief in commonly accepted moral values. Now all this is changed: today's course in applied ethics does not seek to convey a set of moral truths but tries to encourage the student to think carefully about complex moral issues."[15] Dallas Willard continues stating that "there now is no recongnized moral knowledge upon which projects of fostering moral development could be based."[16]

In the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* Robert Coles, profesor of psychiatry and medical humanities at Harvard wrote an essay on *The Disparity Between Intellect and Character.* The task of connecting intellect to character, Coles said "is daunting".[17] One of his students decided to leave the school. As she had her last talk with professor Cole, she said "I've been taking all these philosophy courses, and we talk about what's true, what's important, what's *good*. Well, how do you teach people to *be* good? What's the point of *knowing* good if you don't keep trying to *become* a good person?"[18]

Isolation

The answer to the third question is again is "NO." We are not happier. It is obvious that, at least in western society, the standard of living has grown considerably in the last fifty years. We have better jobs, have moved to bigger towns, own bigger cars to drive on bigger roads, live in bigger homes, shop from bigger supermarkets. On top of these, there are a multitude of devises that promise information and communication: mobile phones, ipods, ipads, laptops… with zettabytes of information available. From a distance, we are much better than before. Still, the statistics are far from being positive. People are insolated, frustrated and this kills them. The Global suicide rates have increased 60% in the past 45 years. On average, one person dies by suicide every 40 seconds

somewhere in the world. Over one million people die by suicide worldwide each year.[19]

Justin Worland in his article *Why Loneliness May Be the Next Big Public–Health Issue* states that: "Loneliness kills. That's the conclusion of a new study by Brigham Young University researchers who say they are sounding the alarm on what could be the next big public–health issue, on par with obesity and substance abuse. The subjective feeling of loneliness increases risk of death by 26%, according to the new study in the journal *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. Social isolation—or lacking social connection—and living alone were found to be even more devastating to a person's health than feeling lonely, respectively increasing mortality risk by 29% to 32%."[20]

But this is not all. According to research carried out over the past decade at the University of Chicago, the feeling of loneliness triggers what psychologists call hypervigilance of social threat. In this state, which is entered into unknowingly, the individual becomes hyperalert to rejection, growing increasingly inclined to perceive social interactions as tinged with hostility or scorn. The result is a vicious circle of withdrawal, in which the lonely person becomes increasingly suspicious, intensifying their sense of isolation.[21]

Loneliness is recognized as a problem man had even prior to "The Fall." First man had a wonderfull relationship with God, in obedience and communion. He also had a relationship with all the creation, ruling over it. There was one unmet need for Adam, the need for a person, like him, to have a relationship with. It seems like this need was not meet by God nor by creation. John Ortberg described it as a "human shaped hole".[22] Long after "The Fall" this human shaped hole is getting wider and the hope for a genuine solution is less visible. Skepticism closes almost any solution for a real cure.

The Solution

We must be optimistically looking for solutions. There must be a solution to information overload, to lack of character and isolation. We just need to look for it in the right place.

The easiest solutions are the technical ones: for informatic overload people build bigger filters. People are more able to filter what they want to see or receive, and in a sense they will get more power over the flood of information. But this is not a solution to personal problems: less knowledge, less wisdom and less happiness. What shall we do with oversuperficial students, robotized workers, privatized (online) worshipers, absent fathers and insolated neighbors?

For a real solution we need to turn to our Creator. God is the ultimate reality and the answer to so many problems that man faces. The Bible presents a triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a mystery, above our ability to understand, but it is all right because we are mere humans and He is God. Even the concept of *trinity* (one God in three person) is so challenging, there is an intrinsic truth that shines out of it: God lives in a loving relationship. When we read that *God is love*, we understand that love is a relationship word. Love implies giving to someone and receiving from someone.

God intended the same loving community when He created man and woman. *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:27) His image is not the male or the female, but male *and* female in a loving, trusting, harmonious relationship. The closest relationship we can experience is in a godly family. It is not a surprise that married people are 10% happier than unmaried people.[23] Likewise, His intended relationships are found in an extended family, friends and other smaller communities.

Jesus Christ, came to earth and gave us an example of a loving community where information became transformational. Mark notices that "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those He wanted, and they came to Him. He appointed twelve that they *might be with Him* and that He might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons." (Mark 3:13–15) The first opportunity of the twelve disciples was to spend time with Jesus, to be connected, to be a community, like a family. This setting helped them to feel loved, important and open to each other. This small group fostered a teachable spirit and a transformation from what they knew to what they became.

A key word is *connected* in a community. This is exactly what is lost in our age dominated with so many avenues to be connected through social media, to have virtual friends, followers, people you never met and perhaps you will never meet. Is the internet creating a real community? Does it connect people? Not at all. Whatever promised to connect people really disconnected them. They celebrate their birthdays *alone*, with hundreds of birthday wishes on facebook, they suffer alone and cry alone. Reality hits home, it doesn't matter how many "likes" they got to their recently posted photo.

Most of the people today are like the paralyzed man whom Jesus visited at Bethesda. He was sick thirty–eight years. When Jesus asked him if he wanted to get well, his answer was revealing: "I have no one to help me" (John 5:7). I have no one, *I am alone*, this is a heart cry even today!

Olivia Laing, in her article, *The Future of Loneliness*, explained that "the promise of the internet is contact. It seems to offer an antidote to loneliness, trumping even the most utopian urban environment by enabling strangers to develop relationships along shared lines of interest, no matter how shy or isolated they might be in their own physical lives."[24] She continued, destroying the internet connection myth saying: "But proximity, as city dwellers know, does not necessarily mean intimacy. Access to other people is not by itself enough to dispel the gloom of internal isolation. Loneliness can be most acute in a crowd."[25]

But this doesn't have to be so! Loneliness can be overcome by belonging to a caring community. The hyper–vigilance for social threat developed in time is slowly replaced with trust and vulnerability. Dr. Brené Brown conducted thousands of interviews to discover what lies at the root of social connection. "A thorough analysis of the data revealed what it was: vulnerability. To be clear, vulnerability does not mean being weak or submissive. To the contrary, it implies the courage to be your authentic self. The rewards of vulnerability are immeasurable. When you embrace an authentic and vulnerable stance toward life, people will meet you there in that openness, allowing you to experience true connection.[26] The implication of a great connecting activity is that

people became more open to real friendships. Studies showed that close work friendships boost employee satisfaction by 50%.[27]

Community is also a place to get wiser. Jesus took twelve disciples to teach them, to train them, to transform them and to equip them for the job ahead. There is a miracle taking place in such a community: people learn from each other and are shaped by each other. There is a dynamic of positive change. Jesus could have taken one disciple at a time and spent three month on a one to one experience, but he chose to give them a community to be informed and transformed.

Blanchard, Meyer and Ruhe offer the passing of knowledge as a solution for the gap between knowing and doing. They recognized that people get loads of information at different conferences or seminars, but as soon as they go home, they are too busy to go back to work. Their advice is to "pass the knowledge on" within the week from the time they get the information. Instead of learning more and more without applying it "people should learn less more and not more less."[28] This involve what they called "spaced repetition". Jesus did that 200 years before Blanchard recognized the principle. Jesus did not tell the disciples all the information at once, but He taught them slowly and repeated until they got it. Actually, the most important and radical teaching they received came only after Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus was the perfect teacher, He decided the curriculum, the process of learning and most importantly the outcome of learning. At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) Jesus was very clear about who is really graduating; who will be accepted into His Kingdom. He gave them the illustration of fruit. "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:17–20). You graduate when you have fruit, not only branches and life. And the final words are straight forward: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. [22] Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not

prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' [23] And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:21–23).

It is great to have information, to aquire knowledge, but the fruit of knowledge is your character, behavior, and your deeds. That is why either a family or a small group is the best setting for a connecting community. It helps overcome loneliness, build character, turn information into knowledge, and knowledge into wisdom.

NOTES

[1] Cf http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/knowledge (Last accesed on March 23, 2016.)

[2] Hosea 4:1

[3] Brett King, "Too Much Content: A World of Exponential Information Growth", http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brett-king/too-much-content-a-world-_b_809677.html (Last accessed on April 09, 2016.)

[4] David Russell Schilling, "Knowledge Doubling Every 12 Months, Soon to be Every 12 Hours" http://www.industrytap.com/knowledge-doubling-every-12-months-soon-to-be-every-12-hours/3950?utm_content=buffer99c87&utm_medium=social&utm_source=plus.google.com&utm_campaign=buffer (Last accessed on April 10, 2016.)

[5] Susan Gunelius, "The Data Explosion in 2014 Minute by Minute—Infographic." See http://aci.info/2014/07/12/the-data-explosion-in-2014-minute-by-minute-infographic (Last accessed on April 09, 2016.)

[6] Vice President and Chief Technology Officer, Office of Innovation A leader in CSC's technology community.

[7] Director, Leading Edge Forum.

[8] William Koff, Paul Gustafson, "Data rEvolution" See: http://assets1.csc.com/innovation/downloads/LEF_2011Data_rEvolution.pdf (Last accessed on April 09, 2016.)

[9] Brett King, "Too Much Content: A World of Exponential Information Growth." See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brett-king/too-much-content-a-world-_b_809677.html (Last accessed on April 9, 2016.)

[10] Charles Roe, "The Growth of Unstructured Data: What To Do with All Those Zettabytes?" See http://www.dataversity.net/the-growth-of-unstructured-data-what-are-we-going-to-do-with-all-those-zettabytes/ (Last accessed on April 9, 2016.)

[11] "EMC's Record Breaking Product Launch," Chuck Hollis blog, 14 January

2011, http://chucksblog.emc.com/chucks_blog/2011/01/emcs-record-breaking-product-launch.html See also: http://assets1.csc.com/innovation/downloads/LEF_2011 Data_rEvolution.pdf (Last accessed on April 9, 2016.)

[12] "Technology Trends You Can't Afford to Ignore," Gartner Webinar, January 2010, slide 8. Cf. http://www.gartner.com/it/content/1258400/1258425/january_6_techtrends _rpaquet.pdf, as chited in

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[13] Kenneth, H. Blanchard, Paul J. Meyer, and Dick Ruhe. *Know Can Do!: Put Your Know-how into Action* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007), 1.

[14] Blanchard, *Know Can Do*, 16.

[15] Derek Bok, The Presiden's Report 1986-87 (Chambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 2–3, in Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 2.

[16] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 3.

[17] "Points of view", by Robert Coles, The Chronicle of Higher Education, September 22, 1995, p. A68, in Willard, 3.

[18] Ibid. 4.

[19] Cf. http://www.suicide.org/international-suicide-statistics.html (Last accessed on April 8, 2016.

[20] Justin Worland, "Why Loneliness May Be the Next Big Public-Health Issue," Cf. http://time.com/3747784/loneliness-mortality/ (Last accessed on April 9, 2016.)

[21] OIivia Laing, "The future of Leneliness", Cf. http://www.theguardian.com/ society/2015/apr/01/future-of-loneliness-internet-isolation (Last accessed on April 9, 2016.)

[22] John Ortberg, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 31.

[23] Charnita Fance, "The Scientific Facts of Happiness You Never Knew," Cf. http://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/the-science-happiness.html (Last accessed on April 9, 2016.

[24] Laing, "The future of loneliness", (Last accessed on April 9, 2016.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Smantha Feinberg, "7 Happiness Habits, Backed-by-Science." Cf. https://projecthappiness.com/7-happiness-habits-backed-by-science/ (Last accessed on April 9, 2016.)

[27] "11 Shocking Employee Happiness Statistics That Will Blow Your Mind." Cf. http://www.snacknation.com/blog/employee-happiness/ (Last accessed on April 9, 2016.)

[28] Kenneth, H. Blanchard, Paul J. Meyer, and Dick Ruhe. *Know Can Do!: Put Your Know–how into Action* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett–Koehler Publishers, 2007), 21.

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