

By FRANCOIS BOGACZ
editor@leaderonomics.com

HERE, I am not talking about mass migration of educated people from one country to another, but the cognitive capacity of an individual brain over time.

Research shows that age takes a significant toll on our cognitive capacities in the long term. However, physical exercise, a proper diet and sustained social activities allow us to counteract those effects of time.

But, what about brain drain in the short term? Much more important than age is the daily type of "brain drain" we all experience, which is far more significant and affects all of us without being conscious of it. It's called ego or decision depletion.

Our brains need optimal levels of glucose and oxygen resources to function well cognitively – glucose being the fuel of our neurons, the fundamental units of the brain.

Yet the brain's ability to control or manage its use of these resources is limited, especially if we have to think hard as the day progresses.

Our cognitive skills decline as we deplete these basic resources, and if we do not refill, we lose our cognitive capacities and even our self-control.

A paper shows the troubling news that what a judge had for breakfast, or when and what he/she had for a tea break is far more likely to impact a defendant than having a good lawyer.

The study by Danziger et al (2010) surveyed 112 judicial rulings that were

WHAT IS

collected over 50 days in a 10-month period, by eight judges (two females) who preside over two different parole boards that serve four major prisons.

The astonishing observation made by the researchers was that the percentage of favourable rulings dropped gradually from around 65% to nearly 0% within each "decision session" (defined as a period of successive rulings between two tea breaks) and returned abruptly to 65% after a break (See Figure 1).

It is a little frightening to read in the same paper that "the likelihood of a favourable ruling is greater at the very beginning of the work day or after a food break than later in the sequence of cases".

So what, you might say? Well, think about your own working day.

Have you ever thought about how you sort your tasks in the morning, for instance?

Our natural tendency is to rush to check our emails, some of them bringing their lot of negative emotions that need to be managed, and others asking for complex thinking, which takes away our resources.



'BRAIN DRAIN'?

MIND YOUR TEA BREAKS

Then, we might rush to a first meeting, around the middle of the morning, without taking a snack. At the end of that meeting, when our brain resources are at the minimum, we may have to make a critical decision.

The quality of that decision will definitely be negatively impacted, just like for the judges. What can we do about this?

Well, if we develop self-awareness for our emotional sensitivity, for example, we have some good indicators of our brain exhaustion: the more you become sensitive to external triggers, the more your brain is depleted.

Daily brain drain is a reality. Be aware of your personal cycle, make food/oxygen breaks and adapt your daily agenda accordingly.

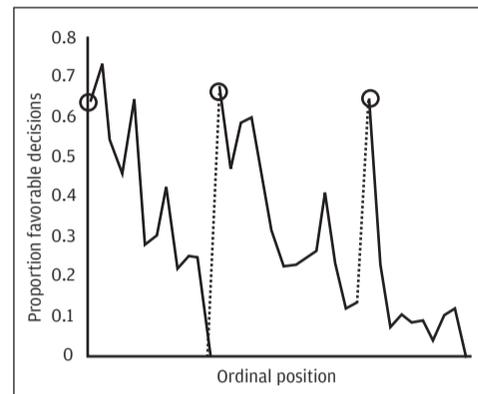


Figure 1: Proportion of rulings in favour of the prisoners by ordinal position. Circled points indicate the first decision in each of the three decision sessions; tick marks on x axis denote every third case; dotted line denotes food break. Because unequal session lengths resulted in a low number of cases for some of the later ordinal positions, the graph is based on the first 95% of the data from each session.

■ François Bogacz is a facilitator and mediator, specialised in the application of neuropsychology to leadership, diversity and conflict resolution. He helps individuals and organisations

maximise their potential by understanding the human brain at the emotional, social and cognitive levels. To get in touch with Bogacz, email editor@leaderonomics.com

WHAT TO DO DURING THE HOLIDAYS?

By YEOH SHU WEN CASSANDRA
editor@leaderonomics.com

WE all love holidays! The anticipation of the holiday break would send tingles of joyful anticipation down our spine. It could be a semester break or transition to the next level of education.

Everyone will be given the same period of time; the question is whether you make use of it as a stepping stone for your career.

Few years down the road, the precious time of youth can never be brought back. To treasure your time, the following activities are highly recommended.

1 INTERNSHIP

Internship programmes are professional career hands-on training programmes which offer work experience which you just can't get in the classroom.

Throughout your internship, you can decide if it is the right career for you. In Malaysia, a typical internship lasts from six to 12 weeks. Therefore, you can "test out" your future career without committing too much time.

Although these positions may be paid or unpaid, the benefits of doing an internship go far beyond your pay cheque.

Internships allow you to build networking opportunities. You get to meet people who might help you land a job and give you the contacts in the industry you're trying to break into. As the saying goes, knowing people never hurts.

An internship can help build your confidence, while building your resume. During job interviews, when an interviewer asks if you have the experience of doing something, your work experience, if relevant, would allow you to answer with confidence.

Statistics show that there is a high chance for interns to find permanent, paid employment with the organisations they interned with.



2 VOLUNTEER YOURSELF

Volunteering has a meaningful, positive impact on your community. Apart from developing new skills, did you know volunteering also boosts your career?

A survey carried out by TimeBank of 200 leading businesses in the UK shows:

- 73% of employers would recruit a candidate with volunteering experience over one without
- 94% of employers believe that volunteering can add to skills.

By volunteering, you're certainly giving back to society the benefits it gave you. As certain groups of communities suffer due to social injustice, what better way can you bridge the expanding gap if not through volunteering?

Although no one can solve all of the world's problems, making your little corner of the world a little better would have a big impact towards society.

And, you know what, volunteering brings together people from all walks of life. Everyone you get to meet from different backgrounds would be a rich source of inspiration in your life.

After meeting new people and gaining new knowledge, this could change your perception of life as well as leave a lasting impact on you.



3 FAMILY TIES

Family is where life begins and love never ends. There is no investment wiser than spending quality time with your family.

I see my family as a gift, which lasts forever. As family stands for "Father And Mother I Love You", holidays are definitely a good time to strengthen our bonds and renew relationships.

No matter how life changes, those who would love us unconditionally are our parents. As Jim Butcher puts it: "When everything goes to hell, the people who stand by you without flinching – they are your family."

Not knowing when our loved ones would depart from us, the time to build a close-knit family should be treasured most.

■ Cassandra, 18, is enjoying a gap year before pursuing her passion to be a lawyer in order to help others. Before interning with The Star, she volunteered a few months to teach underprivileged children. Cassandra puts her family before everything else and is truly grateful she can now spend quality time with them. She lives by the tagline "I may find a prince, but my dad would still be my king." She would love to hear from you via editor@leaderonomics.com