

Feed Journal

Jonas Martinsson's Blog

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jonasmartinsson.blogspot.com

Walden and I

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Submitted at 1:17 Sep 8, 2010

My yearly Sweden vacations are ever so offline. Checking e-mail is 15 kilometers away, and an unexpected liberator in that. So how does this affect me? Well, last year's experience made me discover Honore's "Slow", a short book about simplifying your life, and taking time to smell the roses. During this year's vacation, I hit the Swedish book shops with the intent to find similar titles. But I was disappointed with seemingly shallow follow-ups trying to ride the success wave of Slow. Hours of book browsing later I came back empty-handed, disappointed not because I couldn't find what I wanted but rather because I didn't know what I was looking for.

Some days later I received a gift from my mother, a book with exquisite drawings and fine writings from a Swedish lake in the Mälaren area ("Sjö" by Gunnar Brusewitz). I was extremely pleased with the gift and started to ponder how removed I had become from nature. Living a city life, commuting to a cubicle, racing between commitments both at



work and at home, and never taking the time to reflect, my life is not in harmony. With the vacation spent in lush landscapes, it is a disturbing contrast. My wife says I get depressed when I return home from summer vacations.

Resting in the grass of my mother's garden, it hit me: Walden by Thoreau! Of course! This book is commonly referenced in the books I like the most. Why not turn to the original thoughts? Returning to the book store I was lucky to find a modern acclaim-winning translation to Swedish. Ka-ching!

I am proud to say that I digested Walden for two months, reading and

rereading it and penetrating the text. Still, I am incapable of reviewing it. It is simply too unwieldy for such an effort. What fascinated me the most is how relevant Walden is today. Perhaps even more so than when originally published in 1854. A central question in the book is if we are slaves or masters of technology. I believe we have become more enslaved in the century-and-a-half since Walden was written; today it is all but possible to escape the ubiquity of technology. While technology has enabled tremendous progress and human potential, it has also tethered us to an ever-faster pace of technological invention. Are we in control of this pace today, and will we be in control tomorrow? This is an important question from a global perspective - but Walden deals with the personal perspective. Can we live a rich life with technology? Thoreau's answer is a resounding "No".

How did Walden change me? I try to achieve fewer things. I try to keep my to-do list short. I try to spend more time off-the-grid. I try to reflect before I act. I try to connect to nature. I try to smell the roses. But one thing is certain: simplicity is not easy, but comes with significant rewards.

The World and You

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Submitted at 12:25 May 3, 2011

Today, more and more people find themselves living in a foreign country. Be it a temporary state or a more permanent situation (as for myself); regardless, the world is becoming more global and multi-cultural. Or is it? And what exactly is culture? These are some of the questions that is being answered in Geert Hofstede's cultural research, which now spans five decades. The book is a goldmine for people who are puzzled by culture clashes, and want to increase their understanding of cultural behavior. And who isn't puzzled by cultural enigmas these days? No matter where you live, you just have to turn on the TV or head down to your local market or restaurant, and you will be exposed to foreign culture.

[Cultures and Organizations: Software for the Mind, Third Edition](#)

It turns out that the environment where we grew up ingrains eternal values in us. These values can be analyzed and measured, with averages calculated per country to quantify regional differences. This is exactly what Geert Hofstede has been doing since the sixties.

This book has personally helped me to straighten out two types of question marks; questions relating to why I sometimes feel out-of-place in my new country, and questions relating to how international conflicts play out.

The research identifies six dimensions, where countries are ranked:

- Power distance
- Individualism
- Masculinity
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Long-term versus short-term orientation
- Subjective well-being (happiness)

For me personally, moving from Sweden to Israel, I can empirically verify Hofstede's data that the greatest differences between the countries are in "uncertainty avoidance" and "masculinity". Israelis are fighting the inherent uncertainty of life, while Swedes generally accept uncertainty. A trivial example of this, is that during my wife's pregnancy we have had numerous medical examination and ultrasounds, more than I can count; while the Swedish pregnancy exams are counted on the fingers of one hand. The fact that Sweden is labeled as a more "feminine" country than Israel has implications, on many levels including personal, family, gender, sex, education, consumption, workplace, politics and religion.

I highly recommend anyone to read this book. And especially if you find yourself living abroad, you owe it to yourself to understand why your new life is so strange. There is logic behind it.



No More Attachments?

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Submitted at 17:01 Apr 10, 2010

The last couple of months have proven hectic, as Mainsoft pushed out [Harmony](#) for both Google Docs and SharePoint. Harmony is a free product that lets you access your online documents from an Outlook sidebar. As Harmony's product manager it's been one hell of a ride defining and seeing the product through to launch. You can see (hear) me presenting a video for each product on the respective product pages for [Google Docs](#) and [SharePoint](#). After all the hard work it is great to read the write-ups in [TechCrunch](#), [Lifehacker](#), and [other sites](#).

So what is Harmony in a nutshell?

Having your shared documents available in Outlook enables some cool new features which changes the game for how you think about e-mail and attachments. You can drag attachments from incoming messages to the Google Docs or SharePoint, where they are easily shared with anyone.

And when you send a message, linked documents are automatically shared with recipients, regardless if they have a Google account or not. And when you send an attachment, Harmony suggests that you replace it with a link to a shared document instead. Hence, Harmony's tagline: "No Attachments".

My IBM Interview

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Submitted at 13:25 Jun 7, 2010

Valerie Skinner [interviewed me](#) for the IBM "Yin meets Yang" blog. I am sharing my thoughts on agile, Jazz and other software development stuff.

Impeccable timing, since my company today also [launches](#) a preview of our integration product for Jazz and Lotus Connections.

Two Books On Presentations

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Submitted at 16:54 Jun 2, 2010

Recently, I had the enjoyment to read two good books on presentations. You know, these humiliating affairs feared more than death itself. One is "Confessions of a Public Speaker", which I panhandled from a colleague after reading his praising tweet; the other is "Presentation Zen", a longtime item on my Wish List. I wrote Amazon reviews for both books:

One thing is certain, Scott Berkun has the gift of the gab. The author's personal experiences as a speaker at conferences is greatly entertaining and full of humorous anecdotes. I promptly subscribed to his [blog](#), to get more of Berkun's good writing.

But of course, that's not why you read this book, you want to learn about public speaking. And Berkun doesn't disappoint. His first-hand, pragmatic advice on all matters

related to public speaking is useful and highly relevant for budding speakers. The book is not, neither does it try to be, a complete reference - but rather a view into the hard work behind presentations.

Let's make it clear that Scott Berkun is not a glamorous celebrity on the speaking circuit. But he is a professional with a name for himself. I think that makes him even better suited to write this book, more so than a superstar such as Jobs or Gladwell.

No matter if you have any upcoming speaking events, you'll get the itch to give it a go after reading this book. I highly recommend it.

Conceptually, Presentation Zen is an excellent book. Unfortunately, I didn't enjoy it as much as I would've wanted to.

Let's start with the good. I love Garr Reynolds's artistic approach to slide design, giving a death kneel to the ubiquitous bullet points. This is where the book really shines, and

where you will learn the most. If this section would have been expanded to form the entire book, I would be in heaven.

Here's what I didn't like. Plenty of concepts are mentioned repeatedly, degrading the reading experience when the book is read cover-to-cover. There's also some typographical errors in the book, an issue that always gets me fuming.

But my largest gripe is about the font chapter. There is no such chapter. With plenty of sample slides showing how a changed font can improve upon a slide design, not a single word is written on font usage.

To summarize, the concepts and ideas put forward on slide design are great, and I know that my slides will look better next time I design a slide deck. However, I think that the book is not reaching its full potential, with a halting treatment on slide design - the book's claim to fame.

Finding a Great Windows VPS Host

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Submitted at 1:49 Apr 16, 2010

I have been hosting my web sites on [WebHost4Life](#) for a long time, and they have served me well for years. However, after they recently migrated to a new infrastructure I have experienced problems. They still offer a great budget hosting alternative for ASP.NET/SQL Server sites with lower system requirements, but I decided to take my business elsewhere.

I evaluated Windows VPS hosts that offer an isolated hosting environment for a good price. Here are the shortlist of the [Windows virtual private servers](#) that I considered:

[1and1](#)

I immediately recognized the brand from magazine ads. Their Windows VPS offerings are very attractive on paper, but their system specs seemed

somewhat outdated, especially their choice of database server. They offer MSDE 2000, which Microsoft stopped supporting two years ago. I didn't really see this as a showstopper, and sent a message to their sales department to understand if I would be able to upgrade the database server myself. After over 2 business days I am still waiting for a reply to this inquiry, or indication that they are looking into it. Needless to say, if this is the response time for sales requests, I don't want to even think of how tech support works.

[UltraHosting](#)

This host has great reviews and they support Xen technology, which prevents them from overselling RAM - a common practice in the VPS space. Their prices are attractive, but a bit steeper than 1and1. I went ahead and decided to pay more for better quality and support. But, as I checked out my order I found out that they require a credit card to be associated

with PayPal, a practice that most other online merchants don't follow. This was a no go for me.

[VPSLand](#)

VPSLand offers great prices for great system specs. I was very close to choosing them, but then I read several online reviews about how they consistently suffer from downtime and slow pings. Perhaps they could have been a good host but I didn't want to take the risk.

[KickAss VPS](#)

KickAss VPS has a great reputation in hosting forums, and good system specs to go with that. Their prices are a bit above the previous hosts, although they have a price guarantee. If you find a cheaper service with the same specs they match that price, and give you an additional 10% off. Also, they replied very quickly to my e-mail questions. This is the host I finally went with and I hope it will serve me for a long time.

Book Review: Switch

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Do you ever feel like you want to change something but don't know how? If you are anything like me, this is a challenge you face daily. Luckily for us, the Heath brother has taken upon themselves to create a comprehensive framework for how to

go about changing someone or something. What's even better is that they succeeded to write another great book, that lives up to the high expectations from their debut blockbuster Made to Stick.

[Switch](#) reaches Gladwellian mastery when it comes to readability and entertainment value. But the true value comes with the concrete framework for driving change. Laying out such a framework follows

in the tradition of Made to Stick, and has become something of a Heath trademark. With this framework, driving change replaces the guesswork with a more methodological approach to change where the outcome can be predicted.

I enjoyed this book immensely and I expect to get as much value out of Switch as I got out of Made to Stick. I can't wait for their next book, whatever it may be.

The Maturity of Agile Development

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Submitted at 16:01 Sep 16, 2009

Recent discussions about the coexistence of the Capability Maturity Model (CMM) and agile development has prompted me to revisit my master's thesis on the subject.

Ten years ago, I was one of the first practitioners of eXtreme Programming (XP), a software development method that belongs to the [agile development](#) movement. The big stumbling block of these methods has always been how to introduce it in an organization. Mentioning the words "extreme programming" makes you fight an uphill battle from the start. Agile is definitely a better word when presenting it. But still, the adoption of agile development requires a shift in the organizational culture, which historically has been more formal.

After having participated in and coached a few pilot projects, I started to think about how to best introduce the method in a software organization. This thinking caused me to return to university to research the topic - the result was a master's thesis on the subject.

During my research, I considered the existing and accepted certification levels in the software industry and compared it with the agile way of developing software. [The Capability Maturity Model \(CMM\)](#) is the most widely accepted definition for measuring process and organizational maturity. It was developed by academics and industry experts and is used by the largest governmental organizations in the world. If I could find that XP was compatible with the CMM, it would be so much easier to introduce in software development organizations.

What I found went beyond compatibility between the CMM and XP - I actually found that XP is an excellent springboard for organizations that want to reach greater levels of CMM maturity! I presented my findings at the XP2003 conference and these results are still used by many organizations to convince risk-averse managers of the traits of agile development. [Maturing Extreme Programming Through The CMM](#)

It is interesting to see that today, the members of the agile community are still fighting the same battle. Scott Ambler, IBM's agile expert and evangelist, is working on an [Agile Process Maturity Model \(APMM\)](#), for the same reasons: to ease that adoption of agile methods in traditional software organizations.

GCR Ch 3: Evolution Theory and the Future of Humanity

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I read [Global Catastrophic Risks](#) not only to deepen my understanding of global risks, but also to find ways to practically do something about it. Hopefully, [blogging about the chapters](#) as I digest them will assist on both accounts.

The book's chapter 3 discusses our understanding of evolution, given the long perspective.

Evolution is not unique and has occurred several times in our history. Tool-making hominoids with communication skills have evolved independently in Africa (our ancestors), Europe (the ancestors of the Neanderthal) and south-east Asia ("hobbits").

Environmental change is the major catalyst to drive evolution. Once species have filled their niches in the wake of an environmental change,



adaptation of organisms is only fine-tuned.

It has also been shown that in the last 40,000 years evolution has been driving our species forward, 100 times faster than before. Why this is so, is still unclear.

Today, psychological pressures and new environmental factors decide who among us reproduce.

When considering evolution, it is easy to focus on the physical adaptation of organisms, but as humans evolve, it becomes increasingly important to consider intellectual evolution. We are still struggling to understand how to measure intelligence well. IQ is only one aspect of human

intelligence, and has a low degree of inheritance. We still need to figure out if and how evolution can help humankind grow smarter over time. Although, in the near future, technical progress and the [singularity](#) are likely to supersede the process of evolution when it comes to improving the human race.

So how is evolution relevant to existential risks? It all comes down to how capable we will be in adapting to a changing environment. History has given us many examples of cultures going under because of their failure to survive a new environment. For example, the medieval Norse colonists in Greenland died out as they failed to change their eating habits, in a changing climate.

But, if climate change gives us enough time, our behavioral and societal models will have time to adapt.

Doing Less

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I'm now back from a relaxing vacation, doing close to nothing. The return to a hectic business life is a stark contrast. This has led me to set out a plan of doing less this year.

But don't get me wrong. Last year, I had great strategies, plans and goals for [FeedJournal](#) as well as for other personal projects. But looking back, nothing much moved forward. I can find no other reason for this than that I was feeling bogged down by the weight of my commitments.

That's why I this year plan to do less. By this logic, I hope to accomplish more.

As an example, the long promised rewrite of the [FeedJournal Publisher](#) interface will take the back seat to a revamp of the existing interface, which by all means is working well. Improving what is there requires some magnitudes less effort.

I hope it's as simple as that.

The Cognitive Overload of RockMelt

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Submitted at 12:17 Nov 8, 2010

Maybe I am just getting old.

But I simply don't get the concept of [RockMelt](#), the newest flockesque browser/social-thingy on the horizon. It crams IM, social networks, and a web browser into one glorified application.

I quietly ask myself how I would ever be able to get work done in an environment with that amount of cognitive overload? When accessing a web page I would be bombarded with information from the social sphere. Reading a longer article in that browser would be a feat worthy of the deepest reverence.

On the surface, it seems nice and innocent enough to save a couple of Alt-Tabs to access my social networks. But the Alt-Tabs are there for a reason: to separate different contexts. 95% of the time when I am on a web page, I am there for a reason, and I don't want to be distracted by other stuff.

I believe the way forward is to simplify the user experience and use separate applications for web browsing and IM/social, so that the IM/social interactions can be turned off when you need to get things done. The web browser is probably the most used application on your Desktop. That's exactly why it needs to be a workspace that allows you to work without interruptions.

GCR Ch 5: Cognitive Biases Potentially Affecting Judgment of Global Risks

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Submitted at 15:30 May 13, 2010

I read [Global Catastrophic Risks](#) not only to deepen my understanding of global risks, but also to find ways to practically do something about it. Hopefully, [blogging about the chapters](#) as I digest them will assist on both accounts.

"All else being equal, not many people would prefer to destroy the world. [...] Therefore I suggest that if the Earth is destroyed, it will probably be a mistake."

Eliezer Yudowsky goes on by describing mistakes in human reasoning and how flawed our

intuition is. The heuristics we use to evaluate probabilities, form the basis for how we deal with all types of existential risk. Knowledge of human psychological flaws are therefore important as we shape agendas for risk prevention.

It is interesting to note that knowledge of these very biases and flaws does not make us much smarter. Research shows that when we compensate for our known biases, they are reduced by some 50% but never go away completely.

"It is a terribly frightening thing, but people do not become any smarter, just because the survival of humankind is at stake."

GCR Ch 4: Millennial Tendencies in Response to Apocalyptic Threats

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Submitted at 14:19 May 9, 2010

I read [Global Catastrophic Risks](#) not only to deepen my understanding of global risks, but also to find ways to practically do something about it. Hopefully, [blogging about the chapters](#) as I digest them will assist on both accounts.

This is the weakest chapter so far. [Millennialism](#) is the expectation that the world will be destroyed and replaced with a better world. Millennial belief comes in two flavors: religious and scientific. The religious form spans many religions, while scientific millennialism is best exemplified by the [Singularitarians](#), led by [Ray Kurzweil](#).

While the larger portion of the chapter outlines different types of



millennialism, the question is: how does it relate to evaluating global

catastrophic risks? This is where the chapter truly fails. While the author brings forward examples ([Y2K](#)) where millennial impulses helped to bring risks to the global agenda, there are no genuine suggestions how to factor in millennialism when evaluating risks. The bottom line is "millennialism [...] require[s] vigilant self-interrogation to avoid [large risks]." Doh!

The Lost Symbol

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Submitted at 2:28 Jan 1, 2010

I just finished Dan Brown's latest book, [The Lost Symbol](#). I enjoyed it to a great extent, especially being introduced to curious new subjects such as [Noetic theory](#). As with most commercial successes, The Lost Symbol did not go down well with critics. But of course, the culture elite can't stay elitist if their taste blends

with the populace. Good for them.

Just as with Brown's previous book, The Da Vinci Code, it sparked my interest in code breaking. Researching cryptography, I stumbled upon the [tweleve](#) discussion forum, dedicated to solving puzzles and treasure hunts. There, I discovered two intriguing unsolved puzzles: [Maranatha](#) and [Quest for the Golden Eagle](#). It doesn't hurt that there is a million dollar prize in each puzzle. Wish me luck.

Google Docs Templates For Product Managers

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I created two new Google Docs document templates for Product Management work: a Product Requirements Document (PRD) and a Functional Specifications Document (FSD). These are two central documents in the product

development lifecycle. The requirements document is used for a product's business and marketing requirements, while the specification document further details how those requirements will be implemented in the product.

I'll start to [dogfood](#) these templates right away and will make updates along the way as needed. Please let me know if you find them useful or would like to see any changes!