

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

Why has stupid taken over?

When I was young, there were plenty of unfit people who got drunk on weekends, drove on highways, and ended up dead in car crashes. Since then we have added all sorts of safety devices, reduced drunk driving by criminalizing it and discouraging it, made cars and highways safer, and so forth.

Unanticipated consequences

The anticipated consequence was that a lot fewer people are dying of this – good thing. The unanticipated consequence is that most of the survivors were the unfit people who would have died. Thus we have increased the ratio of unfit people to more fit people.

Fitness defined

Of course that is in the context of when I was young. I am not talking about physical fitness here. Fit as in evolution – random variation and selective survival. By making it harder to die we have stopped selecting for people who are more risk¹ averse. So more people act in a manner with less certainty about their futures. You don't need to be as careful to survive, so people who are more carefree survive at higher rates, and whether it is genetic or memetic, we evolve to being less careful.

Another word for this is careless

As our society gets filled with a higher ratio of careless people, we naturally have to keep increasing the automated and built-in safety mechanisms or the ratio of people dying will increase. So we did until the long anticipated recent and current pandemic. Now the world became dangerous, our previously unfit, temporarily fit, now again unfit populations started dying off in larger numbers. Those who followed the science deniers died in higher ratios than those who got vaccinated and wore masks. The more careful among us had higher survival rates. A few more pandemics like this and nature might do some more to...

Cull the herd

On a global scale humanity seems to be willing to cower to the rich and powerful and their corruption and abuse of power. This is not new. As the technology advances to where the consequences are larger and more global, the amplification of greed and stupidity stemming from inbreeding (memetic as well as genetic) means we are aiming for a cliff. And make no mistake about it, we will fall off of it, because it seems to be our nature.

Save us oh savior

The natural next step for stupid humanity is to look for a savior. We have huge religions based on the concept, and it's a model with a meme that has proven successful. As I recently found on re-listening to the "Country Music" series, the reason Church is on Sunday morning is so we can go out and get drunk and laid Saturday night and be forgiven the next morning. So naturally we will seek a savior who will be a fraud because anyone who isn't wouldn't.

1 Risk ~= uncertainty about the future – aversion ~= narrow anticipated futures to be more certain

But it could be...

One of the fun questions commonly asked is something to the effect of “If [Jesus | Mohamed | Buddha | whoever] showed up today, what would happen to them?”. The implied claim and common answer is that they would never make it in today’s world. We had our Gandhi, but he never claimed to be God-like. Note that when I was young, you couldn’t get away with writing God – it had to be G-d, or in Hebrew, YHWH (which isn’t pronounced like it spells unlike every other Hebrew word). Mohamed you can say and spell, but not produce or provide images of. So it seems apparent (and abhorrent) that we will not get a real savior but rather one or more false ones. That’s because ... they could be real... and how can we tell the difference when the decision is based on a leap of faith?

"There is no limit to stupidity." - Dario V. Forte

I have had this quote on the all.net Web site for many years. So we have an infinite and unbounded supply of stupidity, but clearly only a very limited supply of intelligence. I like the semi-joke that “An alien race came to earth, saw humans, and found no intelligence life”.

Part of our stupidity is our approach to artificial intelligence, where we find the ability of ChatGPT (a.k.a. large language models) to bullshit to be astonishingly intelligent (seeming). Our stupidity is reflected in the many tasks it can do and tests it can pass that are used to discern qualified expertise from unqualified others. I would like to have it pass the bar for me in every state and get a CPA’s license as well.

The less we have to think the stupider we become

We have created a world of complexity which we have now increased to the level where you cannot do the day to day stuff you need to get along without using automation to reduce the complexity and perform the tasks of everyday life. Of course the automation is likely more reliable at doing repetitive tasks than people are, but of course it is far more brittle to stupidity at the inputs, and we seem to be able to automate stupidity really well. So we build crap on crap and increasingly operate on a crap mountain of software because we are too stupid to decide to think though things.

A JuuL of an example

For many years I have been telling people how Angel to Exit (my company where we help grow companies) decides on investments / assistance. I have told them, among other things, that while I am sure you can make a fortune making a more addictive version of a cigarette, it’s not something we will do because we only do things we think are not harmful and seek things that are beneficial to the world. I used cigarettes as an analogy because I thought it was an obvious example of something bad for the world. Little did I know...

I first learned of JuuL on “American Greed” (a TV series). They acted like the founders were criminals, but they never actually claimed anything the founders did was criminal. It turns out JuuL made a version of a cigarette (vaping nicotine) that is higher concentration and apparently more addictive, but doesn’t have a lot of the bad things (like paper ashes) you breathe in with cigarettes. Packaged to sell to young smokers, asserted to be aimed at saving the lives of existing smokers by replacing cigarettes while making billions for the founders and displacing more harmful cigarettes. Now I will have to change my analogy – but I fear whatever I cite will become the next big thing.

How could they be so stupid?

The claim is that JuuL is somehow malicious and fraudulent. But there is an old saying

“Never attribute to malice that which can be explained by stupidity”

Recently I have decided that “never” is a bit too strong here. It causes you to delay too long before seeing potential malice. And a history of individuals with malice should likely cause you to view future actions as malice over accident.

Now I cannot look into the hearts and minds of the founders of JuuL, and I am not really picking on them over the many others who have done stupid things. They did a lot of smart things. They did smart science to get a better way to deliver highly addictive substances at high volume with rapid blood penetration. They made their products appealing to cause more to be sold and bought. They had a nice path to recurring revenue. They did giveaways to generate social (and neurological) buzz. And they made their advertisements appealing to their initial customers and used social media to spread the word. Indeed they seem to have done all the right things to grow their company and bring more value to their investors (and themselves). And it grow from nothing to a multi-billion dollar company in only 4 years! All smart things.

The stupid came at the start

As smart people who were scientists, it appears they looked at the scientific side of the problem of reducing smoking deaths, but ignored the human side of how their change to the world would impact the unfit masses.

But that was at the point where they were already students at Stanford University. Their upbringing and education in science and their exposure to entrepreneurship in Silicon Valley came after they were educated for many years and lived with their families as they grew up.

How were they supposed to know if they were not educated in the social sciences while they were brought up? How were they supposed to decide to “go slow” and test things more thoroughly in an environment with competitors constantly nipping at their heels. And if they didn’t do it, wouldn’t someone else? They of course experimented on themselves. Did you ever hear of “The Fly” and other such science fiction movies?

And all of this came on the heels of vaping for cannabis smokers, and many vaping victims in hospital. Who taught and all of the folks at their competitors now growing at a rapid pace as well to behave this way?

Our society taught them to do this

The stupidity came at the start – of their lives. We have so many ‘smart’ people who act so ‘stupid’ly because our society teaches ignorance of things you are not focused on. Humans have limited attention capabilities and to get through the process and understand the complexity of one field takes a lot of time and effort. As a society we are moving away from the traditional liberal² education, away from the physically present university system³, away from the social aspects of how to live and work with others, away from the norms of a society, into a diverse but increasingly fragmented and differentiated society driven by social media.

² Meaning broad-based, not a political position

³ Pandemics will tend to do this of course

Hindsight

I was also brought up poorly in this regard. In a sense, I was brought up to fail in the modern world by being taught a different set of social values. I have the engineers disease of always trying to tell the whole truth, as if there was such a thing, and of being direct and saying what I think instead of thinking about what I say, in the context of the audience and how they will think of me and whatever I am talking about.

*Rick : [to Ilsa] "I wouldn't bring up Paris if I were you, it's poor salesmanship."*⁴

I would feel compelled to bring it up of course. And in the movie, it helped to make the emotional sale. But I would have blown it.

Over many years I have sought to learn how to change my ways, but I keep coming back to the fact that I like these ways, for me. I know they do not sell well, so when I develop sales and marketing plans, I am careful to make sure that the people doing the selling are provided with the proper tools to represent the relevant things to the potential customers, rather than to present things that are unlikely to be relevant and more likely to confuse than clarify the value.

I am not at all certain that the founders above or most folks would make significant changes looking backwards. Nor do we get the chance to do so. That's not what hindsight is for. It's for looking back to improve how we anticipate the future and seek to constrain the risks.

Why then are we all so stupid?

Individually, we are not. Individually, we have learned genetically through survival and memetically through our life path to not step in front of traffic, jump off of high places, and so forth.

*Kay : A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky dangerous animals and you know it.*⁵

But as a society, in groups, we don't get that many experiments, and the changes in the environment associated with rapid scientific and engineering advances followed by social mechanism advances have led us to enormous challenges.

Humans are social animals, and in groups we have learned a lot about systematic success in failure through lots of experiments in businesses and religions over millennia. And we have learned how to lie effectively, do frauds, spy on each other⁶, and otherwise take "unfair" advantage.⁷

But the movement from small-scale slow time frames to global scale immediate time frames created by automation has produced a new environment in which survival a.k.a. fitness has changed its nature. Combined with the high level of success of technology-enhanced deception, the low cost of malicious acts in terms of retribution, and the increased level of safety in previously risk-taking behaviors, this has caused a substantial mismatch between our genetic and memetic evolved behaviors and capacities and the environment in which we increasingly operate. We are stupid because we have created an unanticipated mismatch.

4 From "Casablanca"

5 From "Men in Black"

6 See "Frauds, Spies, and Lies, and How to Defeat Them" – available for free on all.net under Books

7 Perhaps exploitation is the issue here as opposed to fairness.

Come the hackers

While society wrestles with this dilemma using its standard methods learned over many millennia, and companies seek to adapt to the emerging cyber world using the methods it had developed over the years, hackers hack today and stay in the fray.

As in any great social change, the hackers are the ones who ultimately engage with the process head on with noses injured. They are the pointy end of the spear in today's world as the societies and their governance and military and intelligence capabilities catch up, and as companies and their public relations and internal methods catch up.

The hackers, and I count myself among them, are out there very day trying new things and facing the world unshielded by great power or financial or legal protections. We have to walk the path of innovation and fight for what we think right while also making our way in the world.

While we yell from every high place we can find, telling the rest of you to get wise to the realities of the world, telling you to normalize the environment so we can all survive together, we are also in the trenches trying to find new paths from here to there, and seeking our own moral ground to stand and fight for an on.

And we are stupid too

As a hacker⁸ I too am stupid. I am stupid because I keep putting my nose out there to get smacked instead of holding back and going with the flow. I take the hazard expanding the potential futures, and that means my risk profile is likely wider than most others. I have less certainty, and in a world of uncertainty undergoing rapid change, that makes everything all the less clear.

But then I recon that if the future we face is one of rapid change, evolving my personal memetics and the world's memome to less certainty is the best way to make myself and the rest of us smarter, or at least more survivable.

Fitness

I guess you could call me a survivalist, but not in the sense of the folks who want to survive the apocalypse. Rather, I want to survive by avoiding it. I think the best path forward is not to give in to the inevitability of the collapse of our global society, but rather to determine that there will be no collapse and hack a way through the jungle of adversity and change into a better, faster, smarter future. And of course those who are not hackers don't get this, but then that's the nature of their stupidity vs. our stupidity.

Technically, stupidity refers to "the lack of an ordinary level of intelligence, wit, or quickness of mind". But then the term ordinary implies there is some norm and quickness of mind has many facets. If I view myself as ordinary and you view yourself as ordinary, we are each likely stupid to the other. And in terms of brain speed, I clock in at one Fred. How about you?

Conclusions

Stupidity has taken over because it was always in charge. We were just too stupid to recognize it. But our stupidity should not stop us from surviving, thriving, and growing less stupid over the ages. The key is in learning from our mistakes and executing on what we already know how to do. Learn or die, and I say learn!

⁸ On April 2, 2009 ABC News identified Dr. Cohen as the most famous hacker of all time. But times change.