In an eye-opening NPR talk, Harvard professor Ann Blair recently discussed how information overload is certainly not unique to the digital age. This same concern accompanied every invention related to any increase in our ability to more efficiently share more information.

The question of organizing information started the instant humans invented writing. How will the information be stored? How will it be categorized? How can it easily be accessed, seeing as how the same information can be the answer to very different questions? Current questions regarding the unprecedented amount of information available in the digital age are similar to those we faced in the past. As we managed then to address them, we will be able to yet again learn to manage information overload and, taking full advantage of it, advance as a society.

These are some of the questions that McGill professor Daniel J. Levitin addresses in his latest book, *The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload*. In the same tradition as his two best-selling books, *This Is Your Brain On Music: The Science of a Human Obsession*, and *The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature*, he walks us through complex concepts, explaining its intricacies in a clear and engaging voice. The fact that Levitin is a neuroscientist, a professor of Psychology and Behavioural Neuroscience at McGill University in Montreal where he runs the Laboratory for Music Cognition, Perception and Expertise lends the book scientific legitimacy. This is balanced by his philosophical side — reflected in pieces such as “Amnesia” and “The Self That Remains When Memory Is Lost” — which makes the science relatable to daily life.

Levitin begins by discussing the information overload we are currently experiencing and how humans, on an individual level, are attempting to organize and use as much of it as they can. In the second part, the author takes a step back from the individual to discuss the implications of information overload at the level of the home and of society, touching upon the way we can organize both in a more efficient way. The third and final part discusses the future, both in terms of how to raise our children in an age of information overload as well as what organizing information could look like as we continue evolving.

That a vital part of our education should be to learn how to sift through and organize information in such a way that allows us to make decisions is one of the most important things I took from *The Organized Mind*. The quick shift from information available in books to information available online did not give us time to learn how to sift and organize efficiently enough, which creates a sense of helplessness and disempowerment. One sign of this is how the wealth of sometimes contradictory information keeps individuals from making decisions regarding diet or lifestyle best suited to them. Similarly, the wealth of sometimes contradictory information keeps individuals from making decisions regarding their
contribution to the well-being of their communities. In both cases, individuals have good intentions that get lost in a sea of information. There is probably a strong connection with the increasing levels of apathy and lethargy and the sense of disempowerment related to information overload.

While reading *The Organized Mind* will unfortunately not turn you into a master information organizer and retriever, it does give insight into how successful members of society, such as business executives, highly credentialed professionals, artists, and athletes, have “learned to maximize their creativity and efficiency by organizing their lives so that they can spend less time on the mundane, and more time on the inspiring, comforting, and rewarding things in life,” which is something that everyone can benefit from.
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