RESUME OF INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR CHARLES SNOW

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This interview is with Professor Charles Snow. Snow is Professor Emeritus of Strategy and Organization at Penn State University. He was a professor at Penn State from 1974 to 2012. The interview was conducted in 2013 while he was visiting professor at ICOA (Interdisciplinary Center for Organizational Architecture) at Aarhus University. Professor Snow is a founding member of the Organizational Design Community and co-editor of the *Journal of Organization Design*. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Management and is listed in *Who's Who in the Management Sciences* and *Great Writers on Organizations*.

The interview covers his seminal book, *Organizational Strategy, Structure, and Process*, which he wrote with Professor Raymond Miles; moves on to discuss his research on collaborative communities and how this work helped establish the Organizational Design Community (ODC); and finishes with a discussion of what Snow sees as the major challenges for organizations and for organization design research in the future.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY, STRUCTURE, AND PROCESS

In the interview, Snow talks about how he came to write the book *Organizational Strategy, Structure, and Process*[1] with Professor Raymond Miles. Snow was a doctoral student at Berkeley in the late 1960s. At that time, most organization theory was conducted at the micro level, and the focus was not so much on how the entire enterprise navigated its way through the industrial environment. Snow, however, was interested in how organizations adapt. He developed a general model of how top managers perceived the environment, and he expected that managerial perceptions would affect how the organization was structured, how the organization made decisions, etc. In 1970, Snow met Miles, and they gained an interest in each other around the topic of organizational adaptation, and Miles agreed to be Snow's doctoral supervisor.

To study organizational adaptation, they needed a growing industry, one which would have variation in how managers perceived the industry. They ended up collecting data from 62 top managers in 16 firms in the college textbook publishing industry. In analyzing how these 16 firms behaved, they came up with the typology of prospectors, analyzers, and defenders.

The 1978 book came out of Snow's dissertation as well as two subsequent dissertations of Alan Meyer and Henry Coleman. These three pieces of research, covering four different industries, tended to demonstrate the same type of strategic behaviors. Because all of the specific findings could not be covered in a single article, that's how the book came about.

The book grew rapidly in visibility among academics, and also among practitioners. The first managerial use was at Canadian Pacific, where the corporate HR Department developed an instrument to measure the strategy of each of the company's 80 business units. They did not use the labels of prospector, defender, and analyzer, but instead called them A, B, and AB.

Much has happened in the global economy since the book was first published. When asked whether the typology still applies, Snow mentions that the primary change in organizations since the 1970s is the appearance and development of network organizations. Prospecting, analyzing, and defending became functions inside of network organizations.

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1   Miles RE, Snow CC. 1978. *Organizational Strategy, Structure, and Process*. McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES OF FIRMS

Miles and Snow anticipated the emergence of collaborative communities of firms even before their appearance. This came out of an interest in understanding how firms could become not just innovative but *continuously* innovative. Not being able to find an organization that was continuously innovative, they started pulling features from the most innovative firms they could find and welded them together into a description of a specific organizational form. Grant Miles joined their research team, and the result of their project was the 2005 book, *Collaborative Entrepreneurship*[2]. In this book, Miles, Miles, and Snow basically invented an organization which they named OpWin Global Network (short for "opening the window" of innovation). In this fictitious organization, three founding firms got together to achieve continuous innovation by creating a platform for other firms to get together and collaborate, using services that the founding firms provided.

In late 2006, Raymond Miles received a telephone call from Blade.org. They had read the book and found that they looked a lot like OpWin. Miles gave a keynote speach at Blade.org's first birthday party in February 2007. Upon his return, he called Snow, told him about Blade.org, and they decided to study it.

In June 2011, Blade.org ceased operations because its mission had been accomplished. As we know it from Miles, Snow and colleagues' descriptions, Blade.org at one time had 200 member firms. The core of Blade.org, however, was the 70 firms in the computer server market that were all complementary to one another. Some were software firms, others hardware firms, and others resellers. They had been invited by IBM and seven other founding firms to join a collaborative community of firms. IBM had provided a platform to collaborate on innovation projects and established a Principal Office that could provide services to the member firms.

The Organizational Design Community (ODC) was established in 2009. Charles Snow and Raymond Miles were both among the founding members. ODC's mission is to make organization design more visible. It takes a community of scholars as well as practitioners to achieve this purpose. ODC builds on the ideas of Blade.org, how it was organized and operated. ODC members share an interest in the topic of organization design and are willing to contribute to its advancement both theoretically and practically. ODC has had a number of accomplishments including the establishment of the *Journal of Organization Design*. And, unlike Blade.org, ODC's story isn't over yet!

MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR ORGANIZATION DESIGN RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE

According to Snow, the biggest challenge for ODC is to continue to push the topic of organization design. In the first editorial statement of the *Journal of Organization Design*, the need for the field of organization design to focus more on the future was urged. Organization design has traditionally focused mostly on the past, trying to explain and theorize about what has happened rather than what may happen. Adopting a future orientation, we need some way to build and test prototypes of new organizations that are needed for the future, to speed up the process of their development.

A second challenge that he sees is making organization design knowledge actionable. Organization design has always had a concern with both theory and practice. But we need to bridge that gap even better than we have in the past.

A third challenge is collaboration, both within and across organizations. We need to learn more about how to organize large-scale, multi-party collaborative processes.

As Snow concludes the interview, he notes that these are exciting times for the field of organization design.

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2   Miles RE, Miles G, Snow CC. 2005. *Collaborative Entrepreneurship: How Communities of Networked Firms Use Continuous Innovation to Create Economic Wealth.* Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.