INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR GEORGE HUBER

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Professor George Huber holds the Charles and Elizabeth Prothro Regents Chair Emeritus in Business Administration at the University of Texas at Austin. He is a founding member of the Organizational Design Community. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Management and of the Decision Sciences Institute. He is the recipient of multiple international awards for his research contributions.

The interview focuses on Professor Huber's research journey. He explains how he has managed to stay focused while working in many fields, and how his experience in non-academic environments is reflected in his academic thinking. He also explains what moved him into the field of organization design and what he sees as the major challenges for organization design research in the future.

STAYING FOCUSED WHILE WORKING IN MANY FIELDS

The intensity of Huber's research focus is attributable to three factors. First, like almost all researchers, he's curious. Second, and most important, he gets emotionally engaged when he sees an unrecognized threat or important unaddressed issue in the literature. This tendency has been a driving force in his career. Third, he is a problem solving person by nature, as manifested also in his previous occupations as an engineer and as a production manager.

Working in a variety of fields is an unintended consequence of encountering a variety of situations. Besides perceiving interesting problems in other fields and moving towards them, he offered descriptions of three other situations. Sometimes those were situations where he felt that the important issues in the field, and that he was qualified to address, had been effectively addressed. Sometimes they were situations where he felt that, in that field, he'd said all that he wanted to say. Sometimes the situations were ones where he felt that the young researchers moving into the field were more qualified than he, and that he'd be more successful elsewhere.

USING HIS EXPERIENCE FROM NON-ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENTS TO STRENGTHEN HIS SCHOLARLY WORK

Professor Huber used two articles to explain how his non-academic experience[1] has been reflected in his scholarly work. One is his article on the use of cognitive style as a basis for designing management information systems and decision support systems, an article that truncated a very active stream of research.[2] In writing this article, Huber drew on his experience in designing decision-support systems, as well as his research in behavioral decision theory, to argue that the field's then-extensive research focus on cognitive style had not made and would not make significant contributions to the practice of designing MIS and DSS.

Another article drew on his industrial experience to call attention to the fact that it was problematic for designers of knowledge management systems to focus so heavily on

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1 Huber has held full-time positions as a mechanical engineer, production manager, and software designer, and has served as a consultant to many corporations and public agencies, including the Boston Consulting Group, Army Research Institute, National Academy of Sciences, and the U.S. Department of Labor.

2 Huber GP. 1983. Cognitive style as a basis for MIS and DSS designs: Much ado about nothing? *Management Science* 29(5): 567-579.

hardware and software and the 'inventory' of knowledge at the expense of considering how to get people to contribute their knowledge to the organization's knowledge management system and how to deal with the valuable resources of 'sticky' knowledge.[3]

MOVING INTO THE FIELD OF ORGANIZATION DESIGN

Huber explains that his work in organization design followed from what he saw as important, but overlooked, issues in that field. He highlights four articles in which he has addressed these unrecognized shortcomings in the organization design literature. One article addresses the issue of the lack of understanding about the rate of change in organizational environments and how surviving organizations would respond to this change.[4] In this article, he articulated the need for continually responding to ever-more frequent and novel change-inducing threats and opportunities.

Another article addresses the matter of how organizations should integrate advanced information technology into their decision-making processes and organization structures.[5] In this article, he articulated information technology as a determinant of organization design and developed 14 propositions that described how advanced information technologies would impact design.

Huber's paper on organizational learning was an attempt to map the field of organizational learning broadly, in order to curtail the then-evolving definition of organizational learning as intentional trial-and-error learning in organizations.[6] This article was both a tutorial and a critique.

Finally, Huber and his co-authors published a research paper on fit, equifinality, and organizational effectiveness that addressed the absence in the literature of a large-scale and longitudinal study that compared the effectiveness of multiple prominent theories, relating the fit between structure and environment to organizational performance.[7] Specifically, it compared the effectiveness of Miles and Snow's defender, analyzer, prospector model[8] with Mintzberg's five structures model[9] as bases for designing organizations.

CHALLENGES FOR ORGANIZATION DESIGN RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE

According to Huber, there are two major challenges for organization design in the future. One is widely recognized. It is to design organizational mechanisms that enable very rapid adaptation to changes in the organization's environment. The second relates to properly exploiting cognitive computing in organizations. Cognitive computing is the development and use of computers in a human-machine system where the computer is the lead entity. Simply put, the computer identifies organizational problems, comes to understand them, generates solutions, and instructs humans in how to enact the solutions.

3   Huber GP. 2001. Transfer of knowledge in knowledge management systems: Unexplored issues and suggested studies. *European Journal of Information Systems* 10(2): 72-79.
4   Huber GP. 1984. The nature and design of post-industrial organizations. *Management Science* 30(8): 928-951.
5   Huber GP. 1990. A theory of the effects of advanced information technologies on organization design, intelligence, and decision making. *Academy of Management Review* 15(1): 47-71.
6   Huber GP. 1991. Organizational learning: The contributing processes and the literatures. *Organization Science* 2(1): 88-115.
7   Doty DH, Glick W, Huber GP. 1993. Fit, equifinality, and organizational effectiveness. *Academy of Management Journal* 36(6): 1196-1250.
8   Miles RE, Snow CC. 1978. *Organizational Strategy, Structure, and Process*. McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.
9   Mintzberg HT. 1983. *Structure in Fives: Designing Effective Organizations*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.