

## HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

**Masaryk University**

**Faculty**

**Procedure field**

**Applicant**

**Applicant's home unit,  
institution**

**Habilitation thesis**

**Reviewer**

**Reviewer's home unit,  
institution**

Faculty of Economics and Administration

Business Economics and Management

Mag. Dr. Eva Born

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Economics and Administration, Masaryk University  
Towards Organizational Resilience: Development of  
Skills for Coping with the Unexpected

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**Evaluation of the Habilitation Thesis:**

“Towards Organizational Resilience: The Development of Skills for Coping With the Unexpected”

It is concerned with the Exaptation for Creativity and thus positive solutions in the evolution of mankind.

**Introductory considerations:**

Fitting the work into the actual research and prospects of innovation and practical application:

The backbone of the habilitation is a “novel interpretation of expertise” and implications for its practical application in organizational contexts.

The basic ideas and the practical consequences of the trend of research exemplified in the habilitation thesis “Towards Organizational Resilience: Development of Skills for Coping With the Unexpected” can be seen to fit well into most important recent developments not only in the context organizational theory and its economic contexts of application but more generally (as we shall explain below) in the context of “Industrial and Corporate Change”.

There we are referring to a recent paper by Pierpaolo Andriani and Gini Cattani, called “Exaptation as source of creativity, innovation and diversity: Introduction to the Special Section”, i. e. the special issue “Industrial and Corporate Change”, Oxford 2016) containing several important articles in line with our reflections.

One of the core ideas of the habilitation thesis is expressed already on page 14, i.e. that the aim of the work is to provide both an explanatory theory (resting upon valuable and difficultly obtainable empirical material and investigations), a theory exemplifying how the practical experiences of successfully solving surprise situations can be used for further, i.e. the creative and innovative solutions of unexpected events or situations and essentially how to transfer positive, i. e, success experiences to create new explanatory background knowledge, especially in using the “Exaptation of Routines” as a source of creativity.

“Exaptation”, a concept borrowed from evolutionary biology (Andriani/Cattani p3) describes a discontinuous evolutionary process expressed by functional change of a biological trait which may open a new evolutionary trajectory” [cf Gould Vrba 19xx)] – (one can think perhaps of the man-machine interfaces in computers in the context of the economic developments in modern economics). The creative potential (of exaptation) not in the least consists in the appearance of novel functions of features developed via “adaptation”,

functions for which the forms were not originally designed or selected for (Andriani/Cattani p3).

The empirical investigations by E. Born use rarely available material from military sources and real-life situations and sources where e.g. the "Exaptation of Drill" (or other mechanical and adaptive operational techniques) can be studied independently and in a pure mechanical or un-reflected applications [some kind of "Reinkultur"] and the importance/influence of both the establishment and creation of explanatory background knowledge for possible correction (in the application of formalisms) can be investigated in isolation. Thus other causal influences can be kept low. Transferring the result to plain economic contexts means to study the decision relevant influence of implicit routines in the background-knowledge of the management or similar sources. In this context it is important to remark, that an essential feature of the habilitation theses is the essentially explanatory use of modern theory and philosophy of science via the RKW-model (representation – knowledge - world) which allows to study explicitly the influence and change of background-knowledge in order to understand the acceptance and use of routines but what is most important the need of change and especially extension or new application (in the sense of an exaptation) of those routines.

Durchführung, Technical Evaluation / Conceptual Framework / Empirical study:

After discussing the starting point "organizational resilience dealing with organizational the already mentioned essential RKW-model (representation, knowledge, world) is introduced to understand the relevance and influence of background-knowledge upon coming to terms with decisions and actions.

In studying the connections or rather the exaptation of drill in order to cope with surprise in very critical situations there is finally presented a model concerning the possible relationships between types of skill at the one hand and dealings with surprise on the other. These ideas can then be transferred and generalized to the economic area of organization theory in the context of evaluating and exapting routines in order to understand both the limits of application of the latter as well as to support new applications by way of understanding the limits of application and the coming about of those routines due to a reflection of assumptions and the explanatory knowledge they rest upon. The point here is that sometimes (understandings limits of application and sources of misapplication) we have in applying the RKW-Scheme to create "knowledge about the coming about of knowledge" (to prevent misapplication of routines and even generate new routines – which from the point of view of philosophy of science means to understand the "limits (of application) of our forma systems" or rather the necessary "incompleteness" of such systems to prevent misapplications and incorrigible disasters.

Finally the investigation leads to a theory of skill development for dealing with surprise that can well be transferred to the empirical case of "coping with surprise" especially in the context of business, business administration and first of all in applied organization theory since it sheds light upon where to look for solving problems in unexpected situations. One special problem that can be solved with the help of the final scheme is also the problem of entrenchment and the limits of the latter in the context of professionalism.

### **Summary final evaluation**

A final aspect to fit in the habil thesis of Dr. Eva Born into modern developments of organizational theory are most recent considerations and reflections by Haridimos Tsoukas in the context of organization theory. In an article called Praxis, character and competence: "From a behavioral to a communitarian view of the firm", Tsoukas points out that insofar as routines are the building block of organizational capabilities (or competences) ... we need "to open space to study (our emphasis) whether (or not) and how practitioners act with practical [corrective and reflective] wisdom ... namely with contextual sensitivity, emotional alertness and moral agency (we should do something about this) while enacting routines, thus revealing the kind of life they implicitly value and to the realization to which they

contribute.” Tsoukas goes on to stress that “the style (or mode or orientation) that is manifested through praxis (e.g. sponateous re-engineering” ... “we are quasi-educators not mere landlords”) is not a mere cognitive response but indicative of an ethos - a moral sentiment developed through habituation over time “ – which is well exemplified in the last chapter of the habilitation thesis.

Concerning the technical and practical strings of argumentation in the habilitation theses we are confronted with a balancing between “technical fitness” and “evolutionary fitness”, routines and the exaptation of routines (leading to investigate the “exaptation” of explanatory background-knowledge as foundation of/for creativity in organizationally routinized economic enterprises and contexts ) .

So in order to summarize the more general theoretical considerations underlying the habilitation theses it should be very important to support further research especially with respect to the exaptation of routines and the relevance of overcoming the loss of reflection and of background knowledge in the context of innovation (especially in organizational theory with respect to creating “resilience” or stability in unexpected situations, where fast, creative and innovative solutions are necessary) it seems extremely important that someone with the broad scientific background of Dr. Eva Born should be positively supported not only in her habilitation but also in the further research results she will and may be able to provide.

In taking up a remark of Tsoukas 2018 to link “habituated practice with organizational character”, the work can do [Tsoukas quoting H. Simon, 1997] justice to “the facts of how people do react to situations” and “to build more complex theories that matter to those we study” [Tsoukas 2017, Weick 2007].

We thus fully support to establish the “venia docendy” for Dr Eva Born.

**Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence** (number of questions up to the reviewer)

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## Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled “Towards Organizational Resilience: Development of Skills for Coping with the Unexpected” by Eva Born **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Business Economics and Management.

Date: 15.1.2020

Signature: