

## HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

<b>Masaryk University</b>	
<b>Faculty</b>	Faculty of Economics and Administration
<b>Procedure field</b>	Business Economics and Management
<b>Applicant</b>	Mag. Dr. Eva Born
<b>Applicant's home unit, institution</b>	Department of Corporate Economy, Faculty of Economics and Administration, Masaryk University
<b>Habilitation thesis</b>	Towards Organizational Resilience: Development of Skills for Coping with the Unexpected
<b>Reviewer</b>	Prof. Dr. Tihamér Margitay
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How could you become an expert of the unexpected, an expert of managing surprise? At the first glance, this question seems absurd. Because expertise is something that is domain specific. An expert is an expert of something, of a specific field, and that field is defined by a set of phenomena. An expert can cope with the phenomena efficiently by virtue of his/her knowledge. (Knowledge here includes all kinds of knowledge that are necessary for expert performance: knowing-how, knowing-that etc.). Expert seems to know how to cope because s/he knows what to expect, that is, how to project his/her knowledge of the past into the future. How could be such projection possible regarding the unexpected—if unexpected is really something that cannot be expected in the situation?

In this paradigm, the expertise on a field means that the expert knows—explicitly or tacitly, propositionally or by skills—the phenomena and their rules on the basis of past experience. The expert can project his/her knowledge to the future because the phenomena are supposed to obey the same rules in the future. Knowledge of rules and the predictability of the phenomena are the basis of expert performance in this traditional picture. In other words, how could be something unexpected, that cannot be expected and not only overlooked, if it obeys the rules and the expert knows them?

Eva Born seems to use the term surprise in precisely this meaning: it is not only overlooked but cannot be expected.

...surprise either if something entirely new happens or if something familiar is happening in an unexpected or in an untimely manner...(p13.)

Despite the apparent logical tension, Eva Born tries to find the answer to the question: how could you become an expert of the unexpected.

The aim of this work is to create an explanatory theory of how surprise can be consistently and successfully 'tamed'.(p.14.)

In order to avoid the logical inconsistency indicated above she redefines expert knowledge in a way that is consistent with the notion of unexpected.

Experts of the unexpected know how to recognize (1) new situations in which old routines do not work, (2) how stop using old routines under these new circumstances, and (3) how to use skills developed for other purposes to cope with the new situation. Knowledge

is not projected from the past to the unexpected new situations but new knowledge is generated in the moment of need. Exaptation is the underlying mechanism of this process. Available skills are applied to new phenomena, new situations. The phenomena and the situations are new in the sense that skills were not developed to cope with them but to cope with other familiar situations in the past.

The author develops a model that successfully overcomes the logical problem mentioned above. Her model also provides an elegant way how to develop the exaptative potential of trainees' routines. The Born introduces the 'exaptative drill'.

This means that 'rote learning' or [pure] drill are supplemented by teaching, learning and integrating background knowledge on the history, the evolution of trained patterns, their motivation, its potential consequences, as well as explanatory ideas. To put it in a more generalized way, drill is defined as exaptative if trainees also learn the theory behind or underlying the drill. ... The term exaptation is used to refer to the process of using old means to achieve new ends. Thus, 'exaptative drill' should empower trainees to exapt behavioral patterns if they are caught by surprise in novel or unexpected situations. (p.79.)

So the conclusion is that the flexibility and creativity of expert behavior comes from the theoretical understanding of the drilled behavior and from the reflective control over it.

Her suggestions are based on interesting and valuable empirical research. Let us put aside the many merits of this research and let me highlight—rather one-sidedly—one possible issue of this research. The interview guide is given in Appendix 2. Born writes:

Stage 3: Here the respondent was asked to explain why he acted the way he did. The goal of this stage was to gain an understanding of the thought processes, reasoning, and emotions of the respondent in the described situation. This included questions such as:

*Why did you do that?*

*What were your intentions there?*

*Were there any rules that guided your actions?*

*Which rules did you apply and why?*

*Which rules did you not apply and why? (page number is missing)*

Informants are supposed to give the reasons of their actions. However, psychologists, cognitive scientists and philosophers widely agree on that we are highly unreliable informants on these issues; when it comes to the question why we did what we did. We—as agents (cognitive and otherwise)—are not transparent for ourselves. Moreover, our memory distorts even those items that could have been available on the spot. Therefore, direct questions concerning the informant's motives and reasons in retrospective interviews are usually not reliable means to discover reasons or motives of actions. This is why cognitive psychologists prefer experiment and observation to interviews and why they often use interviews in a roundabout and supplementary way. (The methodological problems of eliciting expert knowledge are discussed, e.g., in Ericsson, K.A. et al (eds.) 2006. *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. Part III. pp.127-263.) Following from the nature of the phenomena (cognitive processes in deployment) experimental and observational research methods cannot be used in this study. However, Gary Klein et al, the founding fathers of the Naturalistic Decision Making approach, developed a methodology involving questionnaires that is less prone to distortion than direct questions about the informant's reasons and motives while still revealing the thought processes of the informants. They used their methodology to study soldiers of US Marine Corps, firefighters and others in order to reveal how they make decisions and solve problems in deployment. (E.g., Klein, G. 2004. *The Power of Intuition*. N.Y.: Currency.)

To sum up, Eva Born's thesis addresses a highly important (epistemological and) organizational problem and suggests an original and intriguing solution to this issue.

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

The author seems to develop a theory of what and how *individuals* need to know in order to cope with unexpected situations. This is certainly the first and most important step to develop a theory of *organizational* resilience. However, the link between the individual and the organizational level remains to be clarified. Could she briefly explain how the ability of individuals to cope with unexpected situations add up to the capability of an organization to react efficiently to unexpected situation? Are there further group level requirements for cognitively resilient individuals to constitute a resilient group?

**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.

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