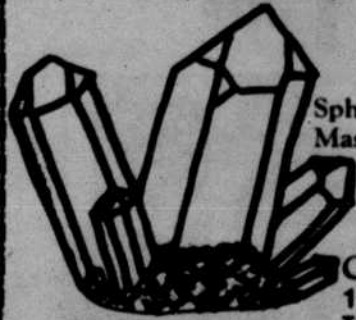


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Speaker advocates computers for business decision making

By Stan Nelson
Of the Emerald

According to a pioneer of artificial intelligence, there are few differences between the way computers process information and the way the human brain works.

While the eyes and ears operate on parallel systems, much of the brain operates serially — one thing at a time, said Herbert Simon, a psychology and computer science professor at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, on Friday at the Chiles Business Center.

Thus, expert computer systems have proved their effectiveness as decision-making tools for American business, he said. There are now systems that can perform functions at an expert's level in areas such as medical diagnosis and oil exploration, Simon said.

The advantage of the expert computer systems is the ability to process information faster than the human brain, looking for specific recurring characteristics and situations, Simon said.

While the applications of these systems have occurred in analytic, middle-management tasks such as inventory, where numerical data can be stored; the application has been scarce for upper-management decision making because of the intuitive nature of most decisions, Simon said.

Simon believes there is relatively little difference between intuitive and analytical decision making.

Ninety percent of most management decisions are reached without a lengthy analysis, and are based on

previous judgments, Simon said.

However, "We should not conclude, therefore, it's some kind of magical process," Simon said. Although the decision might be based on a manager's intuition, the basis of the decision often rests on prior decisions, he said.

In the business setting, intuition could be called the ability of the business manager to recognize repeating analytic patterns, he said.

"What intuition is — if it's good intuition, reliable intuition — is frozen analysis," Simon said.

No one becomes an expert decision maker without years of experience, though. It is the managers' years of experience that give them the ability to identify and successfully react to recurring business situations, Simon said.

If the similarity between analytic and intuitive decision making is accepted by business, then the expert systems could aid in upper-management decision making, Simon said.

"Good judgment doesn't mean it cannot be improved," Simon continued. Analytic tools provide for reflection and aid in finding unobserved business patterns, he said.

At business schools, greater emphasis should be placed on recognition of business patterns and taking learned knowledge and putting it to practice, Simon said. Much emphasis is placed on athletic training, yet very little is placed on intellectual training, he said.

Simon won the Nobel Prize for economics in 1978 and the 1986 Medal of Science for his work in behavioral science.

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