


Balasubramanian, N, & Muth, R. (2006). Simon, Herbert. In F. W. English (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of educational leadership and administration: Volume 2 L-Z* (pp. 930-931). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

 **SIMON, HERBERT**

American polymath, intellectual virtuoso, and Renaissance man are among the terms used to describe

Herbert A. Simon (1916–2001), whose pioneering contributions to problem-solving and decision-making processes of individuals and organizations won him worldwide recognition. A professor of computer science and psychology at Carnegie Mellon University from 1949 until his death in 2001, Simon described himself as a mathematical, social, and behavioral scientist when he received the Nobel Prize for economics in 1978. Yet his interests and accomplishments spanned several fields, including political science, organizational theory, game theory, economics, public administration, cognitive psychology, and artificial intelligence. Simon, though, stayed focused on the philosophy of physics and the use of computers for simulating human cognition throughout his career.

Simon was influenced strongly by his excellent public school education in Milwaukee and ably supported at home by an electrical engineer father and pianist mother. His interest in the social sciences was stimulated by the psychology and economics books of his uncle, Harold Merkel. Recognizing inherent internal cognitive limitations (including knowledge, experience, self-interest, and power drives) and external social constraints of individuals, he advocated the notion of *satisficing*, which describes the “good enough” choices and decisions that people make. These limited rational choice-making abilities of individuals Simon called “bounded rationality,” indicating that people are incapable of objectively processing the overwhelming information and decision alternatives available to them.

A second concept that Simon used to characterize bounded rationality was *selective search*, which decision makers use to explore alternatives. Both concepts, satisficing and searching, were founded on the psychological theories of dynamic goal setting and levels of individual aspiration, outlined by Kurt Lewin. Simon’s explorations of human choice and decision making in administration, which also incorporate his scientific inquiry into expertise and budgeting, provide the central theme in *Administrative Behavior*.

Simon’s passion for understanding how people think and process information led him to write *The Sciences of the Artificial*. Here, he made a compelling case for teaching pattern recognition to all learners to help them develop problem-solving strategies and purposeful self-directed learning. With an abundance of information available from people, print, media, and the Internet, Simon redefined *knowledge* as the

ability to find and use information and learning as changes that allow systems to adapt and perform better with repeated attempts.

Simon’s autobiography, *Models of My Life*, provides a vivid description of his extraordinary life. His departmental Web pages, maintained at Carnegie Mellon University, link to articles on how he enriched the life of his colleagues; his research in psychology, economics, philosophy of science, and computer science; and his publications from 1930 to 2001. The prolific Simon authored over 25 books and 1,000 articles. His legacy will continue to engage and challenge researchers in a broad range of disciplines.

—Nathan Balasubramanian and Rodney Muth

See also administration, theories of; behaviorism; cognition, theories of; decision making; economics, theories of; feedback; human capital; organizational theories; problem solving; productivity; psychology, types of; satisficing, theory of

Further Readings and References

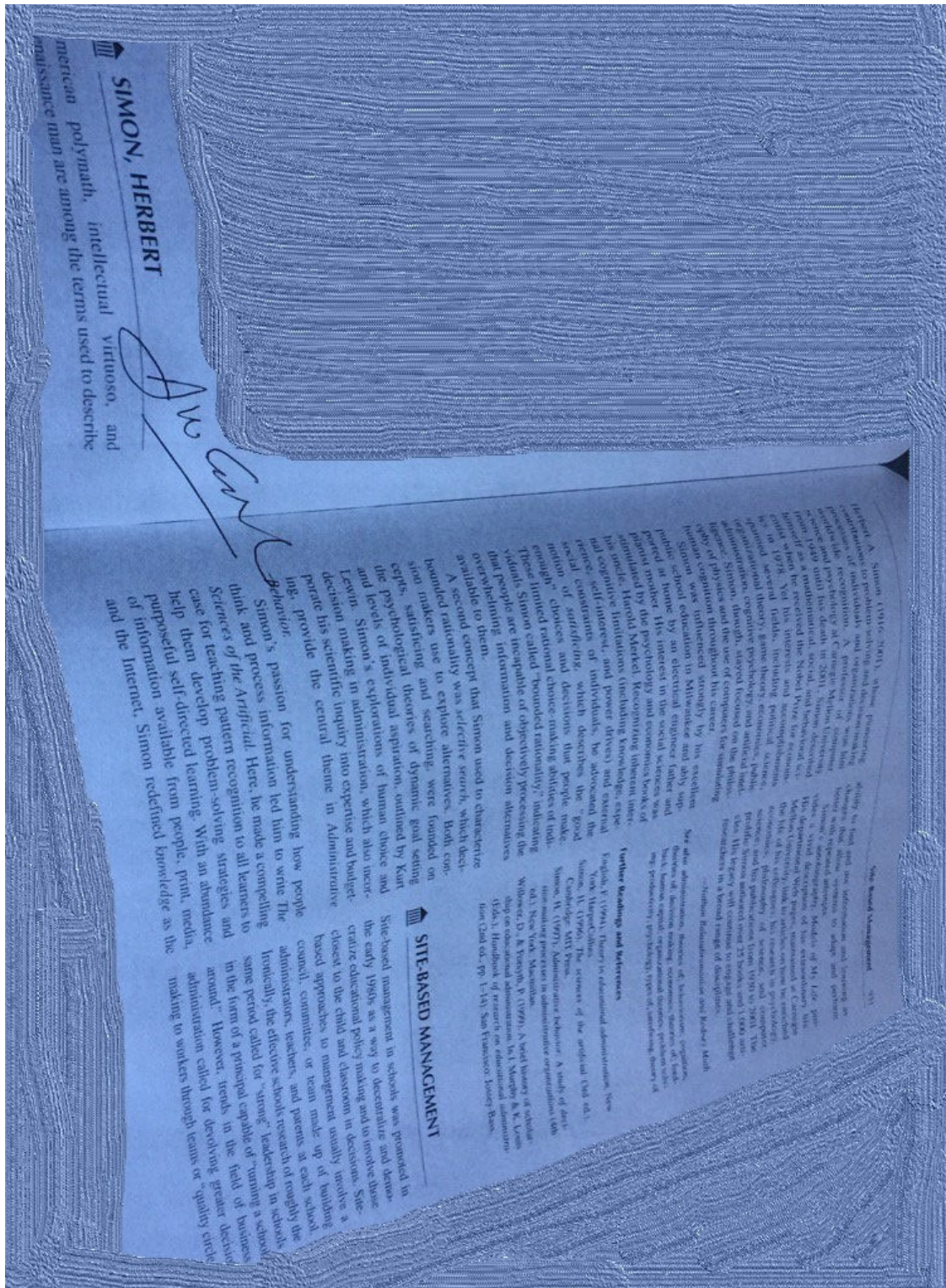
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SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT

Site-based management in schools was promoted in the early 1980s as a way to decentralize and democratize educational policy making and to involve those closest to the child and classroom in decisions. Site-based approaches to management usually involve a council, committee, or team made up of building administrators, teachers, and parents at each school. Ironically, the effective schools research of roughly the same period called for “strong” leadership in schools in the form of a principal capable of “turning a school around.” However, trends in the field of business administration called for devolving greater decision making to workers through teams or “quality circles.”

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