Can you provide a brief overview of your research background, including how you came to do research related to organisational design?

My interest in organisational design originated from a fantastic PhD course taught by Bob Gibbons and George Baker at MIT. I was fascinated by the perspective that organisations are created and designed to manage difficult conflicts that cannot be resolved by the “market”.

What are focusing your research efforts on at the present?

I am currently working on understanding organisational change and organisational inertia; in particular, how organisations learn, or fail to learn, to adapt to changes in their environment. In one recent project, Anton Kolotilin and I show how episodic, dramatic reorganisations are inevitable features of complex organisations that face constant external change.

What has been your major research achievement to date?

My major research achievement to date is a paper, co-authored with Maria Guadalupe and Julie Wulf of INSEAD, documenting a significant change in the composition of top management teams in recent decades. We find that senior leadership of large firms has become increasingly populated by functional managers who are specialists in a specific area (such as the CFO or CTO) rather than generalists such as division managers. We show that this change is a natural economic consequence of two major forces: the increasing prevalence of information technology within organisations, and a trend towards more focused, less diversified organisations.

How do you think research on organisational design will develop over the next five to ten years?

Currently, we as a field are making great progress in understanding the processes by which organisations — and individuals within organisations — learn, communicate, and accumulate knowledge; and conversely, the circumstances under which organisations may stagnate or fail
because of an inability to learn. This promises to be a very fruitful area of research in the coming decade.