

**INTERVIEW WITH
DONNA BEHMER
AUGUST 8, 2012
SLOAN ORAL HISTORY SERIES**

B: Bob McKersie
D: Donna Behmer
G: George Roth

G: It is August 8th, and this is George Roth and Bob McKersie interviewing Donna Behmer for the Sloan Oral History Project.

Donna, what's often most helpful is to start when you came here, or even before you came here, what drew you to coming here and what your original impression or expectations were before you came, and what happened when you joined. Then we'll move forward in that time period. Feel free to diverge into any tangential stories that help describe the culture of this place. We don't want just a straight chronology.

D: I came in 1980. Since my spouse was a graduate student at MIT, I looked at opportunities at Sloan

D: I interviewed for a position with John Little, who was the then area head of Management Science. When he hired me, he suggested that I begin taking some courses at Sloan, to "really get to know the place."

Of course, that was the draw, which is how I'm still here today.

The school was smaller then. We were about 70 faculty, and Management Science was the only part of the school that was organized as an area (It was Management Science, plus all of the other sub-groups. No BPS. No EF&A). Accounting was part of Management Science at that time. I was the only one in an area administrative position because there was no other formal area based infrastructure to support the groups – everything else was centrally administered through the Dean's Office.

The thing I remember most about Management Science was that it was very close-knit, it was very informal, it was very small. There was a lot of energy around what everybody was doing.

G: Where was it? Where were you located?

D: In E53, on the third floor.

B: So you were all on that one floor?

D: Yes, but for a small segment of people, maybe some Ph.D. students or visitors, who were up on the corner of the fourth floor. However, everyone connected with each other: You knew all the doctoral students. You knew all the faculty. You knew all the TAs. There were social and intellectual gatherings all the time, as I recall. That is what attracted to me to

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Management Science, because it had an identity as a large area faculty, and it administered itself that way. And John was just an unbelievable person to work for.

B: Did it have the sort of community feeling that Marketing achieved? Remember when Marketing moved over to the building that got torn down, they would have lunches together all the time, and it was an interacting of doctoral students and faculty.

D: Right.

After a year, I moved up to the Dean's Office.

G: 1981, then, about?

At the time that Abraham Siegel was appointed Dean – he created a culture that he often referred to as ‘a jewel of a school’ - He created an atmosphere that was similar to an “extended family” : people who shared an intellectual interest and an interest in exchanging ideas and spending time with each other. It wasn't obligatory. It was just something that people wanted to do. So there were a lot of gatherings of people, and you were able to know what everybody was doing.

D: Management Science was so different than the rest of the school. In this new role in the Deans office I was doing similar work, but I was now doing it for the rest of the school; however for some parts of the school, it was administration at the group level, for some at the individual faculty level. From this initial organization, we implemented the structure of the three academic areas (EFA, BPS, and MSA)

B: Abe took inspiration from Management Science and got all the cats together in the other two areas.

D: Yes. Accounting moved out of Management Science at that point and into EF&A.

B: Right.

D: It was also in concert with the renovation of the building. So people eventually moved into offices based on area and group.

G:

D:

With Abe's organization of the three areas, it gave the rest of campus a way to look at us that was more departmentally structured although we did not shift to a formal departmental structure

G:

G: So you were administering the Management Science area, and also had this OR Center. How did that work? Was that easy? Was it hard?

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D: there was the OR Group in Management Science but the faculty also had another affiliation with the Operations Research Center. The Operations Research Center had students that were affiliated with Sloan, but also shared an affiliation with the School of Engineering. So we didn't oversee the administration of the Operations Research Center, but we intersected with them all the time. That was one way of those outside the school getting to know the school, because it was a formal connection between Engineering and Sloan.

Another formal connection was the Management of Technology Program, which was initially administered through the School of Engineering. It was later administered at Sloan. It became another joint program that had a formal connection between the two schools.

D:

I have another memory that is worth sharing, regarding doctoral program at Sloan. In the first year of my assignment in the Dean's Office, I coordinated financial aid activities. I sat as a listener in the decision-making process for the doctoral program admits.

Every group sent at least one faculty member from their group to the Schell Room in E-51. Every group had a representative. Every group stood up in front of their colleagues, defended who they wanted to bring to the program, why, and sometimes they advocated for bringing in more students into their group than what was customarily allocated to them.

G: Why this year's students were particularly good.

D: Right. It was sometimes a half-day or a whole-day event, with more or less the admit decisions for the school. That happened for some period of time. In contrast, I don't know if that process happens at the group level today

B: It does happen at the area level.

D: Probably only at BPS

G: That's a great example. You said you have some other examples?

D: C-function.

G: So what does C stand for?

D: Consumption. In the 1980s era, all the program offices and all the administration of the school lived on the fourth floor of E-52, which was the same location as the Dean's office. There was a large lobby-ish open area when you first entered the floor off the elevators, and it just had round tables in it—very similar to what you see in the cafeteria downstairs, except much smaller. Every week the students from Sloan came together in that location for that C function. All programs. All the administration for the programs were there. It was a remarkable organizational demonstration of how the school was together. Just like Management Science was together organizationally, the C functions represented another element that was 'all-in' for the

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student body. . The Sloan Student Body had an identity through at least that one function every week.

G: So did that include Sloan Fellows and masters and faculty and Ph.D. students?

D: Yes. Not everyone came every week, but that's where the gathering was and all student programs were included.

G: What was the size of the master's student class at that time?

B: This is the early 1980s?

D: I would say it was about 150-ish.

G: So you had 40-50 Sloan fellows.

D: Yes. We also had a program for Senior Executives, They came in for nine weeks in the fall or nine weeks in the spring. The program was originally scheduled in the conference room of the Dean's office.

G: So it was administered from there but was it run at Endicott then?

D: There must have been certain sessions that were routinely held in the Dean's office. Later it grew to a size such that it was based 100% at Endicott House.

D: When I first came to the school, the research administration of the school was organized at the level of individual faculty, with the exception of the Center for Information Systems Research (CISR) The School moved to the establishment of Centers. Management in the '90s Center. International Financial Services Center. Management and Technology Center.

Faculty worked together more formally: they collaborated on research fund raising, and distributed funds through an RFP process for faculty who were interested in this type of support.

We were probably at our peak at \$15-16 million of research activity that was sponsored during that time,

D: Yes. That was probably the peak. We moved from a research volume of maybe \$2 million per year to a peak (under this Center structure) of about \$15 million. The roster of centers has changed, but the center structure still exists.