INTERVIEW WITH
WANDA ORLIKOWSKI
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B: Bob McKersie
G: George Roth

Introductory remarks by George.

G: When did you first consider coming to MIT? What was your prior knowledge or thoughts about MIT? I think I remember coming to your job talk....

W: Really! Well, I won't ask your recollections of my job talk.

G: I'd be happy to share them, but what can you remember from then?

W: I'm from South Africa, and my undergraduate degree was in computers, so of course I knew about MIT from that. I distinctly remember having a textbook in operating systems, written by Stu Madnick and John Donovan. This book was "the Bible" in operating systems, so of course we knew about MIT because of that. I don't think Sloan was on my agenda as an undergraduate.

I then went on to do a Ph.D. at NYU, where I became familiar with all the research being done on technology and organizations, and piqued my interest. So I switched from a more technical focus on database systems to a focus on technology in organizations, particularly taking a sociological perspective on technology in the workplace.

At that time I had been reading, of course, interesting papers by folks at Sloan such as Tom Malone. He was active in a research community called "Computer Supported Cooperative Work" (CSCW) that I became very interested in. Tom was one of the founders of that community, which was quite influential in my work. Of course, I also knew about John Van Maanen's work because I was very interested in ethnography. So I certainly knew about Sloan during my time as a doctoral student at NYU.

G: What was your undergraduate degree in?

W: It was, technically, a Bachelor of Commerce, BComm... with a double major in business information systems and economics.

B: Which university in South Africa?

W: The University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, or WITS, for short. I started off wanting to be an accountant, if you can imagine. Then halfway through my degree program, I switched. I really enjoyed the computer courses I was taking and as it was clear that computers were becoming more relevant and interesting, I switched majors. And then stayed on to do an Honors and then a Masters degree.

G: What's an Honors?

W: In the British higher education system, which is the same in South Africa, Canada Australia and other commonwealth countries, an undergraduate degree is three years. But if you stay for an extra year, you enroll in a one-year degree program that's called an Honors, which allows you to specialize in whatever your major was. So it would be like a senior year here, but with very few courses and mainly research work, like doing a thesis. So it was essentially a four-year undergraduate degree, that is known as a Bachelors with Honors.

Along the way, especially during my Masters degree, I realized that I was more interested in applications of technology that the theory, so that's why I went to NYU to do my Ph.D. in Information Systems at a business school, rather than in a more disciplinary department.

G: That's a pretty big step, isn't it, to go from South Africa to NYU to go to an American school.

W: Well, yes, but there were difficulties staying in South Africa, and I also knew that if I wanted to stay in academia, I needed to get a Ph.D. degree. And that was hard to do at WITS.

B: What year did you come to NYU?

W: 1983. I applied to a lot of doctoral programs in the States, essentially the ones with the best Ph.D. degrees in my area. And then I visited the various schools I got admitted to get a feel for the people and the place. I ended up selecting NYU and that's where I got my Ph.D.

B: Was it in the Stern School?

W: It wasn't yet the Stern School. It became the Stern School in my last year. When I joined, it was the Graduate School of Business Administration at NYU, which was located downtown a block away from the World Trade Center. The school subsequently moved to the Washington Square location a few years after it became the Stern School.

I then went on the job market and applied to a number of schools. MIT had an opening, and of course I applied here. It was one of the most prestigious schools I was looking at. But it was also one of the best departments in IS, which was my field, so I was drawn to the place both because of the work of the scholars I'd read and also its reputation. I applied and was fortunate enough to get an offer. So the job talk must have been OK! [laughs]

B: That was when?

W: That was 1988. I remember coming to MIT to give my job talk in the middle of a snowstorm. It was February. My contract would have started in the fall of 1988, but I delayed my start by a few months because I wasn't quite finished with my dissertation. I didn't want to start a job until I had completed my dissertation. It involved an extensive field study and so it took a little longer for me to write it up. I actually only joined Sloan in January of 1989.

B: The title of your dissertation?

W: It was titled "Information Technology in Post-Industrial Organizations." It was an ethnographic study of the implementation of computer-aided software engineering tools in a large consulting firm in New York. I spent a lot of time, many months, on different project teams at various client sites, observing the consultants use these new software-automated development tools to try and understand how work practices, control mechanisms, cultural norms, and power relations changed as a result of using the new technological tools.

B: Very logical topic for MIT.

W: Well, I was unsure about getting the job because of the ethnographic approach. This was not a common methodology for IS researchers, whether in the IS Group at MIT or the IS community more generally. But I guess the IS Group here must have been intrigued enough to invite me for an interview. I was very interested in the work of Tom Malone and John Van Maanen. Also at that time, Bob Thomas was here, so there was another important scholar doing ethnographic work. And of course there was Ed Schein doing clinical research, which was appealing. So even though there wasn't anyone in the IS group doing ethnographic studies, there were lots of interesting related things happening.

B: And Michael Scott Morton left the group and was more in strategy.

W: That's right. But he was still very much part of the IS group because I remember....

B: Was the Project of the Nineties alive and well at that point?

W: It was absolutely alive and well. Michael actually participated quite a lot in my recruiting process.

B: Right, he would have been sympathetic.

W: Yes, he was very supportive, as were Tom Malone, John Henderson, and Jack Rockart. I certainly got a sense of ..... an openness and a willingness to learn from other methods, even though it wasn't commonplace. I can't remember if John Van Maanen came to my talk. I certainly remember talking to him during my interviewing process. I recall that John Carroll came to my talk and asked some interesting questions. I got a real sense that there was a respect for this kind of work. Many people back at NYU asked me, "WHY are you interviewing at MIT? It's a very quantitative school, they will not appreciate your very qualitative research approach." But that wasn't my experience at all. Coming up and participating in the recruiting process, I felt a real respect and interest, even from the more technical members of the group such as Stu Madnick and Randy Davis. That spoke volumes to me, actually. And even though I wouldn't have any obvious colleagues in my group, the openness and willingness to engage were very welcoming.

B: Yes, the IS Group has always been multi-faceted.

W: Precisely. I think that helps. Who else was in the group? The group was Tom Malone, Stu Madnick, John Henderson, Chris Kemerer, and Randy Davis. As you say, Michael Scott Morton was sort of still affiliated, as was Jack Rockart.

B: Yes, Jack Rockart was in CISR because that would, in some ways, be a kindred.... They would be very interested in anything that understands how computers are being used.

W: Precisely. Jack was a great supporter from the beginning, as was John Henderson, both of whom were very involved at CISR. Even though they didn't do ethnography, they completely got that it was a valuable alternative, and they were very supportive. As you said, it was a very interesting, eclectic group of people who had lots of interests and were very welcoming. I was the only woman at the time. I know they had had women faculty in the past. Lynne Marcus had been with the group for a few years and then had left. I was not only the only woman in the group, I was the only person in the group doing qualitative work. But I never felt any difficulties with either of those.

I ended up teaching, in my first few years, very technical courses. We still taught technical courses at the time, so I taught a course in database, which I was very comfortable with. I think it helped that I had a technical background.

G: This was primarily to the Sloan Management students....

W: Yes to the MBA students, and it was an elective course on doing database design, which is something we wouldn't teach today.

Do you want to know more specifically the kind of things I taught? Over the years? My teaching portfolio has definitely changed quite a bit.

B: Yes, I think it's very important.

G: We'd be interested in teaching and research. Why don't we start with teaching?

W: I started teaching the database course, and did that for a couple of years. At the time, we also had a core IT course in the MBA program, and so I started to teach that as well. It was a first year required course for MBA students who were learning about IT. The course was an introductory overview of critical IT issues that future managers should know — it included some technology, some strategic uses of IT, and some organizational impact stuff. I taught this for a few years.

Then that course moved out of the core into what became known as the "elective core." So, it was a similar course but now as an elective we could expand on some of the areas covered. I continued teaching multiple sections of that course for quite a few years. But over time (as you may or may not know), the demand for IT courses dropped. So the course got removed from the "elective core" list as there was fewer numbers of students interested in taking IT courses. I think it's quite paradoxical that — even as IT has become more and more important in the world, and as spending on IT by corporations has doubled and tripled, and you couldn't imagine an organization operating effectively in the world today without some digital systems — the interest amongst our students in the topic dropped. We've speculated that it is because students are now much more familiar with technology as they come to graduate school, having studied and used computers for many years in high school and college.

G: They don't need to learn it here; they already know it.

W: Yes, and not in the same way that they need to understand finance and marketing and things they may never have had experience with. As student interest in IT declined, I had to find alternative things to teach in order to fulfill my teaching requirements. So Peter Senge and I got talking, and together we developed a course on systemic change that we called the Enacted Systems view. The content was based on two primary influences. First, it drew on some of my research work that used Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory, which is a very comprehensive social theory on systems continuity and change. Second, we drew on some of Peter's work on system dynamics, and the insights from his *Fifth Discipline* book. So the content centered on a dynamic model of personal and systems change in organizations. We co-taught that course for nine years.

B: That should be quite stimulating.

W: It was, very. And a lot of fun, great fun. And it had quite an inauspicious start because the first year that the course title appeared in the catalog, it was printed as INACTIVE systems. Somebody obviously thought we had made a typo in our course title and "fixed" it for us. And we said, "Well, there won't be many students coming to that course!" [laughing] But fortunately, that did not happen and we always had a nice engagement of students. It was an elective course, so we had about 40 or 50 students every year. The course was a project-based course, and we had the students practice the skills and tools they were learning in class on various projects that they worked on in teams.

Then Deborah Ancona enrolled me to help her work on a leadership course for the Sloan School. Dick Schmalensee — the dean at the time — had tapped her to develop a leadership course and build a leadership center at Sloan. So Deborah recruited Tom Malone, Peter Senge, and me, and the four of us worked together for about a year developing what became the Distributed Leadership model, which we then shaped a course around. The course is not structured in the normal way, it's structured as a three-day workshop. You can see Peter's influence here and the key pedagogical assumption here is that while leadership can't be taught, it can be learned. So we created a 3-day workshop, which generates an environment where students can begin to learn about and develop their leadership capacity. This is now offered as a 3-day course that we teach in multiple sections during IAP every year. And what we do is create the time, space, context, and conditions where we guide the students to start reflecting on and practicing some of the core leadership skills that we think can be particularly useful. We use our Distributed Leadership model that we developed which entails four key capabilities that we believe can be both powerful and practical when put into action personally as well as collectively. We teach it to students in all our degree programs at Sloan as well as in Executive Education. The model has been very well received and we get good feedback about how useful it is in practice. We published a *Harvard Business Review* paper on the model in 2007, and this paper just got selected for inclusion in *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Leadership.*

Then, Action Learning emerged as an important kind of pedagogy in the school. I think the first action learning courses were G-Lab and S- Lab. Quite soon after those were launched, Peter Senge and I got thinking that maybe we could turn our Enacted Systems course into an action learning lab course. Even though our course was doing well, and we enjoyed teaching it, the project component was quite limited. There was a limited amount of things you could do with a project that ran during term time when students were so embroiled in other coursework and various campus commitments. The idea of students having three weeks during IAP that were dedicated to working full-time on projects with companies on site, was very interesting. We saw it as a real opportunity for students to take the ideas of enacted systems and systemic change and put them into practice on the ground working with real issues and real people.

So we restructured our Enacted Systems course into what is now known as L-Lab (Leadership Lab), and focused the content on systemic change around sustainability. Peter had become much more interested in sustainability over the years, and we both felt that an action learning lab would be helped if it was more focused on some specific content, rather than on all kinds of systemic changes in general, which had been the case in our prior course. The official title of the course is now "Leadership Lab: Leading Sustainable Systems." So the idea is that students are learning both about leadership (personal and collective) and systemic change, and how to accomplish that in the context of sustainability. The course is now part of the action learning portfolio, the Sloan leadership curriculum, and the Sloan sustainability certificate.

B: [interrupts] Was this IAP format? Or a regular course?

W: This is a regular course that runs as a fall course for 9 credits, and a then a 6-credit, IAP project component where the students go off-campus and work with the companies that they had been working with remotely during the semester. Then during the IAP period, they have an opportunity to work side by side in the field for three weeks. It's actually a wonderful pedagogical model that allows a powerful way of learning through doing.

G: And then is there something in the spring? The course is in the fall?

W: The course is in the fall, with the IAP project experience in January. Then the students come back to campus in early February and we have a one-day final workshop where we debrief the projects. We usually do that on Registration Day in the spring semester. We've been doing this action learning version of the course for the last seven years, since 2008.

B: It's fascinating. Ed Schein would reflect back on the history of the School. We had people like Ed Nevis and Dick Beckhardt, who offered very practical planned-change courses. I don't know whether Ed is aware of all the things you're doing because his feeling was that we'd lost that whole period of expertise when we had these distinguished people who are very much in the OD tradition.

G: I think Ed, not this August but the August before, when the Academy was here, he went to that action learning workshop all day, where he heard a lot about these projects. It was in August, if you remember. I think Ed really sees some of the history of that, coming from that and David Kolb's work on experiential learning, and his course he created to add to the students' experiential learning.

W: I took that course. I took it as a faculty, so I sat in on it. Very interesting and useful.

B: He's also reflected on the fact that the way Stanford does leadership is quite different than the way we've done it through the Center. At Stanford, almost all of the instructors for leadership are practitioners, hired as lecturers, and the faculty with the disciplinary grounding are not connected at all. So that gets to the question of how learning is lifted up for the students, how are they beginning to get something more than just saying "Well, I had a really great experience at this company." But how they can begin to codify it.

W: That's right. That's the focus of our 3-day workshop on leadership, and also our L-Lab course. We want to give students a set of concepts and tools. The tools are about the "how," some real, specific, practice ideas for working in complex systems where they are trying to change things. But also, it's about giving students some detailed conceptual understanding of why these ideas matter. It's a vocabulary, and a framework, and a way of thinking; it's not just "here's how to have some great experiences," or "this worked in this situation." It's definitely about giving them a framework for thinking, as well as tools for putting those ideas into practice. It's a theory of leading change as well as the practical tools for doing it. And in our 3-day workshop there is a lot of personal work they have to do to develop some of their personal capabilities as leaders. In the action learning lab, the L-Lab course, the students work in teams of four, and we also expect them to be reflective about their attempts to shift the capabilities of the team, so they are practicing their leadership capabilities as team members. So a big chunk of how we evaluate them is not just "what did you deliver to the host organization in terms of helping them shift with respect to sustainability?" But also, "What have you done in your team to change your personal and collective habits of thought and habits of action? Have you shifted some patterns so that they can be a little more generative?"

B: How do they select or recruit a company?

W: We have a very carefully thought-through process where students spend time learning about the project possibilities in the first few weeks of the fall course. We then have a one-day workshop in late September (we just had it two weeks ago) where we invite all the hosts who are hosting projects, to come and spend a day with us. We do a workshop with them and the students, so they get to meet the students, and the students get to meet them. They can talk about project possibilities. Then the students apply in teams for their top project options, and then we match them. We've tried many alternatives and this process seems to work best.

G: How many years have you been doing this?

W: Seven.

G: I've seen Roger Saillant a couple times, and he's pretty familiar with it.

W: Yes, we have often invited him to be a guest speaker in our course.

I also teach a doctoral seminar, which I love. I teach a research seminar on social perspectives on technology at work. Basically, it examines different social theories for studying technology in organizations. So it covers studies in the sociology of technology, sociology of organizations, as well as organization studies and IS literature that examines the social aspects of technology in organization. I teach that every other year and it is wonderful to engage with the doctoral students in this way.

G: From your teaching, it's probably much closer to organizational studies than it is IT.

W: Yes, it has become that over time. Even though I joined the IT group in 1989, I'd always enjoying connecting with the OSG folks – John van Maanen, John Carroll, Lotte Bailyn, Bob Thomas, Deborah Ancona, and JoAnne Yates. I began to collaborate with JoAnne on some research quite early on, and I used to go to the OSG seminars regularly. When I got tenure in 1996, I got an official invitation from the OSG group to join officially. And so I did and now I'm part of both groups.

G: WOS, Work and Organization Studies.

W: Well, it's now become WOS, but it was OSG at the time.

B: So you go to the Thursday seminars...

W: When I can, yes, I do.

B: Does the IT group have a weekly seminar?

W: We used to. We really don't any more, partly because we have a number of research centers that run their own seminar series. The research centers associated with the IT Group are really strong and have been enormously helpful and generative for research that we do...

B: Like Tom Malone...

W: Tom Malone's been involved in a number of centers. He's had the Center for Coordination Science; now he runs the Center for Collective Intelligence. We've got Jack Rockart's Center for Information Systems Research, which is now run by Peter Weill and Jeannie Ross. Erik Brynjolfsson runs the Initiative on the Digital Economy, and Stu Madnick has a number of projects and consortia. Each of these have their own seminars, so it felt like it was just too much to also have our own IT seminars on top of that.

G: They don't tend to run weekly seminars, do they?

W: No, those are more sporadic.

B: You were shifting to research.

W: What would you like to know?

G: How it developed. I feel, in particular – and this is for you to tell – is that you really benefited in the connections that you've made with people here, and your collaboration and how that happened. That's how it extended your initial ethnographic work and pulling out different theories....

W: I think that's right. There's no question, I am the scholar I am today because I've been here for the past 25 years. MIT has been enormously generative and powerful in terms of shaping me and my ideas. I can't imagine the kind of scholar I'd be if I'd gone elsewhere. I think just being here and being part of the incredible intellectual curiosity that is such an energy of this place has been very creative. There is real power in the commitment to ideas that matter, and the value of working on important issues. That is a wonderful part of our culture, and that's given me a kind of confidence in developing my ideas and getting feedback, which has been very generative.

I came with an interest in ethnography in technology, but also an interest in using Giddens' Structuration Theory to make sense of technology in the workplace. I used that for a number of years, and that was very productive.

I then collaborated with JoAnne Yates, which was very interesting and exciting, because we used my interest in structuration processes and her knowledge of literary theory and genres to develop a way of understanding communication practices with new technologies such as email. So we developed a structurational approach to genre theory, which was just a wonderful synthesis of our different interests. We each brought something different to the table and were able to meld these into an interesting way of thinking about technology-mediated communication, which were just burgeoning at the time. Email, collaborative tools like Groupware, and Webex, etc. Communication and collaborative tools were becoming very prominent in the nineties, and we studied those using the theoretical approach we had developed. It was very creative, productive and a huge amount of fun. And again, that would not have been possible if I had not been here…

Another project that could only have happened here was a big project on technology that a few of us in the IT group ran for a number of years. Even though we had very different research interests and perspectives in the IT group, we were all interested in technology as an important phenomenon in the world. I think that brought five of us together around a big NSF proposal we submitted in the early 2000s. And we won an NSF project for $5 million over 5 years to study the social and economic implications of IT. I was the PI on that project, and my co-PIs were Erik Brynjolfsson, Tom Malone, Peter Weill, and JoAnne Yates. The five of us worked on that, with many doctoral students, and it was a great project. We did a lot of different things. Erik and his students worked on the economics part, Tom and Peter worked on business models and the more strategic side of technology, while JoAnne and I examined the organizational issues associated with technology in organizations.

B: That was starting in 2000?

W: Yes, the project started in 2000.

B: And it ran for five years?

W: Yes. It was wonderful. $5 million sounds like such a lot of money, but with our overhead rate.... plus the EB, it ends up being quite a bit less. But still, it was very generous and we really valued and benefited from it. So that brought us together even though we have such different perspectives on the same phenomenon. We had some really interesting conversations. And having those conversations couldn't help but shift how each of us were thinking about our own area. So that was very useful. It also supported a number of doctoral students who went on to do great things.

That's the other thing that's so generative about this place: the doctoral students we attract, and that we can collaborate with them. They do such good work.

So just to finish off the research story. Subsequent to that, I've moved away from structuration theory, although not completely. It still informs my general thinking about social systems. But it's become quite clear that as technology becomes thoroughly integrated into everything we do and every aspect of our lives, structurational frameworks can't quite accommodate the *entanglement* of the digital and the social. Things have become so inseparable now. I'm thinking of the study JoAnne Yates and I did with Melissa Mazmanian on Blackberrys. These investment bankers and lawyers that have become addicted to those devices have become thoroughly entangled with their Blackberrys. They carry them on their bodies all the time, and they use them at all hours of the day and night, and in all imaginable locations and settings. This mobile device has become such an integral part of their identity. What we see from our study is that things have really shifted in terms of what it takes to be a competent professional in those fields. Work for these professionals has been dramatically reconfigured through their own and their colleagues' pervasive use of Blackberrys. .

So anyway, it became quite clear....

B: That's really connecting to Sherry Turkel?

W: Yes, there are interesting overlaps with her work. I came to realize that we needed something beyond structuration theory. I am now working with a colleague at the London School of

Economics, Susan Scott, to develop a theory that we hope will help address this entanglement with technology. We are drawing on work by Lucy Suchman, a well-known CSCW scholar – seems I'm back to CSCW, where I started! [laughing], the Computer Support of Collaborative Work folks. Lucy is an anthropologist. She coined the term *sociomateriality,* and it's the idea that all social life is always dependent in some way on materiality. So even us, in this room, right? Tables, chairs, devices, pens – we tend not to think of these as technologies, but in a way they have become part of how we act and they have come to constitute the practice itself. So Susan and I are developing a framing like sociomateriality to try and understand how digital technologies – things like social media, all these wearable computing devices, the robotic assistants in hospitals and shop floors, etc. – have become so entangled with practices so as to significantly reconfigure them. And we think of that entanglement as constitutive, as really shaping what that practice can do. I think the sociomaterial framework can be helpful in giving us more traction in making some sense of the sorts of digital and algorithmic phenomena that are becoming so dominant in our contemporary society.

Susan and I have also been influenced theoretically by the work of the scholar Karen Barad, who is a physicist and philosopher of technology. We are drawing on her work and applying it in a number of empirical areas. For example, last year we completed a study of TripAdvisor, the social media website that posts hotel reviews; you're probably familiar with it.

G: Based in Needham, right?

W: Now Newton. They were originally in Needham, but now they are in Newton. They needed bigger premises.

G: My goddaughter works there, that's the only reason I know.

W: Very interesting. It was a fascinating study of the shift that has occurred in how hotels are being evaluated. In the past, you had your Michelin inspector who would show up as an anonymous reviewer once a year, or in the UK (because we did a lot of empirical work in the UK), it's an inspector from the AA (Automobile Association in the UK). And these inspectors have their very objective, standardized criteria of evaluating hotels. In the case of the AA, there is a 65-page booklet that describes in great detail what you as a hotelier need to do to get rated as a one-star, two-star, three-star, whatever it is. So the industry goes from that very objective, standardized set of criteria to the user-generated reviews on TripAdvisor where millions of people can openly and anonymously post their opinions.

G: Some paid, some not?

W: Some paid/some not; some false/some not. There are no definitions or standards in place for the six rating categories that TripAdvisor provides, and no verification of whether the person posting the review has actually stayed in the hotel. And the algorithms then take all these ratings and turn it into a ranking for each hotel.

Our empirical study was looking at the differences between the more established, expert-based, standardized and objectified modes of evaluating hotels that have been honed over a century, to the essentially crowd-sourced, anonymous postings of comments that have little grounding in defined criteria. Both valuation schemes have their advantages and disadvantages. And we were interested in understanding what impact the shift from the AA scheme to TripAdvisor has had on hoteliers. So we interviewed a lot of hoteliers about this new world of crowd-based and algorithmic valuations. It has been a big change for them. Many feel a real loss of control.

B: What were some of the bullet points on there?

W: We looked primarily at small to medium-size hotels, because that's where the impact has been highest. For those hoteliers who have been discovered on TripAdvisor (TA), they are very happy. You know, before, they were a small hotel that was doing quite well but relatively unknown because ....

B: They were still under the AA....

W: Yes, or VisitBritain, or some other scheme.

B: Right, but they were off the radar screen.

W: Pretty much. Now they've been discovered on TA, they are the #1 ranked hotel on TA in their region, and their revenues have doubled and tripled. So they love it! Then you talk to the hotelier who just got 2 or 3 bad reviews in a row, and whose ranking has plummeted. He may feel that some of the comments and ratings are inappropriate or even sometimes false. His business has dried up. He's devastated. So you have these highs and lows and everything in the middle. Most feel the difference quite acutely. These people would say, "When I had the inspector from AA show up and give me a report after the inspection, I had something that was concrete, that was practical and actionable, they told me what I had to fix, what wasn't working. It was very clear what I had to do in order to improve and what I needed to do to get to the next star rating. Once a year I had actionable recommendations on which to base my strategy. Now, I turn on my computer every morning and I don't know what I'm going to get. Am I going to have a good day or a bad day?"

Many of the hoteliers now feel they are being micro-managed by the crowd on TA. They're now getting a daily stream of commentary by the crowd, with people saying, "I loved the jam you served at breakfast," and the very next post saying "I hated the jam!" So the feedback can be ambiguous and what action to take as a result can sometimes be quite uncertain.

B: The challenge for TA is to move their protocol to the point where it has as much reliability as AA.

G: You have TA, you have Yelp, you have others. But the reality is, people choose TA. They say, "Let me check TA before I book this."

W: Expedia, for example, does host similar hotel reviews by travelers. But they only let you post a review if you have booked in the hotel, and they know you've booked because they are a booking agency. TA is not a booking agency. They don't know if you've stayed in the hotel or not. And for them to build in that verification would require a lot of effort, and as they don't feel their business has been hurt by not having that extra step, they are (not surprisingly) unwilling. They have millions of reviews. They are the largest travel community in the world. We worked on this project for 5 years and every time we got to write another draft or present at another conference, we had to update the numbers on the size of TA, and it was just growing and growing. It was extraordinary. When we started in 2009, TA had about 20 million reviews, now they're at 250 million reviews and counting. It's got its own momentum now, which is why everyone goes to it because there's so much data there.

B: That's fascinating. And a great example of your research.

W: And we think it's a good example of the entanglement of a technology (in this case the social media site TA) and the social practice of traveling, reviewing, and evaluating hotels. This entanglement has reconfigured travel and hoteliers and the hospitality industry, probably forever.

G: I do remember one time being on a trip in Ireland, and we had the Fodors, which everybody had. We went to this hotel that was run by this widow. It was really run-down and Fodors had given it a great review. They probably had a heart-felt reaction to this woman trying to run her B&B, but it was really not a place you wanted to go again. And the publication cycle of Fodor's was every 3-4 years.

W: That's right. This is one of the places were TA can offer such huge value because it is so immediate, providing the most recent, up-to-date information. Like "Make sure you don't stay in Room 867 as it's right next to the noisy a/c unit." That's really helpful. What the hoteliers experience now is that they no longer have guests showing up but people who have 'armed' themselves with TA reviews, who now demand certain rooms, or refuse to stay in others, or who on checkout will say 'Unless you give me a 10% discount, I'm going to give you a negative review.'"

G: Oh boy, there's leverage! I didn't realize that was happening.

W: Yes, it's happened a few times that we know of. And you can imagine having a difficult experience in a hotel, and getting really angry, and saying to the manager "Well, you know this is going to go into my review." And the manager knows immediately how significant that can be. Before TA, you could complain to the manager but what more could you do? You could write a letter to the local better business bureau and tell all your family and friends, but the impact of your complaint would be minimal or limited. Now it's immediately broadcast to the world. That can have an instant and significant impact.

B: All right, we have other things to cover. Outside of teaching and research, you helped get the Leadership Center going....

W: Yes, I've been on the steering committee for the Leadership Center for a number of years.

B: Have they twisted your arm for any committees or anything? MIT, or Sloan?

W: Over the years I've done my share, I think. [laughing]

I've served on one of the Sloan search committees for dean, when Glen Urban was appointed.

I've served on the search committee for president of MIT, when Susan Hockfield was appointed.

At Sloan, I've been on a number of personnel committees for promotion and tenure. I have been on the Executive Personnel Committee, many times, and am back on it again this year.

I've co-chaired the Sloan Gender Equity Committee with Paul Asquith and have done that for many years. That's a committee that reviews gender issues at the School. Each school has to have one, and every year we do an assessment of where the school is with respect to things such as compensation, chair appointments, committee memberships, and quality of experience.

I've served as Area Head for the Management Science Area, and been head of the IT group a number of times, and am back as head again this year.

B: This is just piecing together a number of things you've said – how do you explain how you've been able to thrive here? Because, to be frank, in the IT area, a lot of people did not get tenure. It was known as a kind of difficult area. What do you see that might have made the difference for you?

W: [pause...] I think what helped was that my work straddled the IT and organization studies communities, and I was able to publish in top IT journals and Organization journals because I brought something different to each of those communities — that is, some technological insight to the organizations community and some organizational insight to the IT community. So I published in the *Administrative Science Quarterly*, the *Academy of Management* journals, *Organization Science* as well as IT journals such as *Information Systems Research* and *MIS Quarterly*. I think when I came up for tenure, my letter writers were from both faculty in IS departments as well as organizational scholars. And hopefully—I wasn't in the room when the tenure decision was made, so I don't really know—I had support from not only the IT faculty but also the OSG faculty. So I think that helped. I think my research was such that it allowed me to speak to multiple communities, and they each saw something of value. What I brought to the IS community was the deep interest in technology along with social and organizational theories. And what I brought to organizational science was a deep understanding of technology. So I think that perhaps that helped to make the difference.

I also had great mentoring along the way. Tom Malone, Deborah Ancona and Lotte Bailyn were wonderful mentors here at Sloan.

B: Yes, those are very good points.

G: Who were the colleagues who were hired when you were?

W: There were quite a few of us. They hired a lot of people that year.

In MS, Dimitris Bertsimas. Anant Balakrishnan, Larry Wein, Steve Eppinger, Karl Ulrich, and myself, and in BPS, Rick Locke, Rebecca Henderson, and Marcie Tyre. There were also probably a few hires in EFA whom I cannot remember.

G: Didn't you guys form a group?

W: Yes, we did. There were 6 of us. And quite coincidentally we had a nice balance across interests — 3 from BPS (Rick, Rebecca, and Marcie) and 3 from MSA (Karl, Steve, and me).

G: I remember hearing your name from someone else in that group.

W: It was a wonderful support group. We called ourselves the Junior Faculty Cabal!

We met, once a month, over dinner, and then we'd talk. Sometimes it was just about what was going on, and it was wonderful to share stresses and frustrations and hear that other people were going through similar issues and concerns. But then as we got a little further down the road, we began to share papers, and read each other's work, and give feedback, which was, again, enormously helpful. Not because we really knew each other's fields or knew the areas, but questions would be raised or a different perspective offered, that sometimes made you think a little differently about the work.

G: Especially because you have very integrative work. That must have been really helpful.

W: Yes. I think there was some puzzlement over my use of structuration theory, but they loved the empirical side and provided great feedback on that! So yes, it was a very helpful experience during the junior faculty years. Sadly, only Steve and I remain at Sloan of that original six in the cabal.

B: Rick Locke got tenure but he moved on.

W: As did Rebecca. She is now at Harvard Business School, and Rick is Provost at Brown University. Both Karl and Marcie left before they got tenure.

What else would you like to know?

B: Our good dean said: Make sure you ask people, What are they most proud of, or what are they very excited about in their time here?

W: As I've mentioned, I have found MIT Sloan to be a generative place to do innovative work. Everyone is doing such interesting and novel work, that you feel compelled and motivated to do innovative work as well. It's been very productive for me. I think my ideas have developed in ways I couldn't have imagined. I think that the impact my work has had in the field would not happened if I hadn't been at MIT. MIT is a powerful platform, and I think it gave some of my work a kind of credibility that it might not have had if it had been done elsewhere. That's the power of this place, that people notice or pay attention differently to the work, and perhaps give it the benefit of the doubt rather than overlooking or dismissing it. Given that my work was non-mainstream in both IT and also Organization Studies (ethnographic, technology-focused, and using social theories that tend to be complex and dense), it was not obviously easy or immediately relevant. And yet, I think people have read it and published it and been interested in it. So the impact it's had has been quite astonishing for me. I was looking the other day – I shouldn't boast –

G: …this is the time to boast!

W: I get asked to do these tenure reviews for other scholars, and I am now seeing that everyone is reporting their Google scholar citations. That's become the new metric. Talk about metrics shaping things! And so I looked myself up and was astonished. I seem to have a lot of citations – about 35,000.

G: Which is a measure of the impact you have had...

W: I'm just floored! But it's been enormously gratifying, and if I hadn't been at MIT, I don't think the ideas and the work would have traveled or been read in the same way. I think I've been very lucky in that way.

What else am I proud of? Pride is such a strange concept.... I don't think of it that way. I love the intellectual autonomy that we practice here, and that we're able to continue to nurture that.

The minute we lose that autonomy, openness, and respect for ideas, then I think our research and teaching will suffer. In research, certainly. But in teaching too. I think the openness to innovating pedagogically has led, for example, to developments such as distributed leadership and action learning. So that we keep innovating what we do, on both the research and teaching fronts, is exciting to be around. There is also a sense that even if you go out on a limb, you will be supported. If it didn't work, we learned something. You get a real sense of "Try it, let's see what happens" – both in the research and the teaching. I think that is just wonderful. You see that with all the partnerships we have across schools, to do joint programs, joint research collaborations. I haven't been as much a part of those, but I think those are all indicative of the openness to innovation and experimentation, which I think is such an important part of this environment.

G: I wanted to ask you about that. You mentioned MIT a lot, but I think you've really talked about Sloan. We've had others who have talked about the relationship with the rest of MIT.

W: I don't really have strong connections across campus. I have served on some Institute committees and I do sometimes attend the STS seminar series. And of course I know Sherry Turkle in STS and Susan Silbey in Anthropology. But we don't have a sociology department here at MIT. If we did, I'd be much more integrated with that.

In my early years here, I did collaborate with a faculty member in engineering, and we ran an experiment with a computer-aided design tool he had developed. But we did not take that any further.

But I love being at MIT. I think of myself as being at MIT. I think that connection with the Institute is vital for the Sloan School. I think we'd lose a lot if we didn't have that.

B: Are there some things that you jotted down that we haven't asked about?

W: No, I don't think so. [pause....] I particularly appreciate the MIT motto *mens et manus*. I didn't know it before I came, and when I came, it just resonated! Because of my background, having trained in the technology side of things, that sensibility appealed. You know, get your hands dirty, get grounded, try some things, learn from doing.

And I also value the Sloan motto, *In the world*, *for the world*, which has emerged over the years. I know some people are somewhat skeptical, but for me, it's aspirational. I think that in our action learning programs, we certainly try and do that. The work we do, our ideas, they should make a difference.

B: With Action Learning, if you were to look at the change in that that occurred in the 25 years you've been here....?

W: I just got my quarter-century letter.... I was like YES!! Chair is on its way.

B: And you talked about the shift from required courses to elective, and the decline of student interest in IT. Again, here's action learning. Are there any other changes in the 25 years that stand out in your mind, about the Sloan School and how Sloan has functioned? We've gotten larger....

W: We have gotten larger. And because we've become larger, I go to meetings now and I don't know a lot of people, which is unfortunate, but that will happen.

I think it's wonderful to get new and younger people in.

But do you mean in terms of structural changes?

B: More the themes, or the culture, or any way in which we've changed?

G: Or even the building change?

W: That was great. I love the new building, unlike some of my BPS colleagues. They gave up a lot, so I understand. If you've moved from the 5th floor of E52, I can see why you've given up something to move to the 3rd floor of E62. But if you've moved from the 3rd floor of E53 like I did, trust me, E62 has been a great improvement! I think what also helps is that the classroom spaces have facilitated our teaching a lot. We now have some flat classrooms. I always teach in flat classrooms because my courses are very experiential, so having some flat classrooms right in the Sloan building has been very helpful.

I think we've certainly changed in our programs, priorities, and processes over the years, but perhaps not in our core values.

B: That's encouraging.
W: Others may see it differently.

B: I think, at this point, you've told us that you have thrived over this 25-year period of time. It's a good story.

G: I was going to ask, maybe to get another level of that story – I'm guessing that you've now kind of accepted and certainly continue to appreciate the environment at MIT. But you must have had doctoral student colleagues that went off to other environments and maybe they didn't have that experience. I don't know if you could compare or contrast that one. If you'd said, if you had gone someplace else, your career would have been very different.

W: I didn't really have....

G: Because you were different enough in what you were doing...

W: Precisely, it's hard to compare, I think. Also, because it's relational. I subscribe to a relational ontology, so things are always emerging and changing. I think the fact that I came here, that this place resonated, was particularly generative to me. When I visit schools and I think about myself working at that school, I can see how things might not have resonated in the same way for me, so maybe it wouldn't have been as generative or I would have developed in different ways. But I can imagine other colleagues thriving in those contexts, and maybe not thriving here. I think a lot of it is a mutually constitutive process that can be amplifying in some ways and stultifying in others. I think I was lucky that, in many important ways, this place just connected for me.

Of course, there have some difficult moments. Everyone has them. But overall, I think it's been a wonderful journey.

END OF INTERVIEW