INTERVIEW WITH
MARY ROWE
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Sloan Oral History Series

M: Mary Rowe
B: Bob McKersie
A: Alan White

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B: Mary is about to retire, so it's a good time to ask her how she came to MIT, and how she got started. What brought you here?

M: First, let me say, I wasn't thinking of myself as retiring, although I'm leaving the Ombuds office. I'm very much looking forward to coming back to Sloan in September.

I came to MIT first in 1972, interviewing for a job that I took in 1973. I've written a lot about those interviews. I became Special Assistant to then-President and Chancellor Jerome B. Wiesner and Paul E. Gray, Special Assistant for Women At Work, and thereby hangs a little of a tale that might be of use to Sloan, which was as follows.

The job had been established, I think it was originally thought of as a two-year appointment of somebody who would be a special assistant for women. But when I interviewed for the job, I asked for a different title, for several reasons. Partly, I was trained as an economist, so I was very interested in work process. Second, I didn't think that whatever problems women had as students, faculty, and staff, would be addressable without looking into work structures and work processes. Since we were looking at people in their work lives, I wanted to have some overview of that which was the organization of work at MIT. I had no real idea what I was saying in asking for this because my history had been as a rising "group leader" in a consulting firm, and I had not real history in large-scale institutions. But it was perhaps a good fantasy, or understanding, that work structures were going to be very important to the lives of women here.

The second thing was that I wanted to have very explicit that any work structure that affected the lives of men was also within my purview. I didn't want to be restricted to seeing only women, mainly because there weren't very many women here, and I didn't think I would learn very much about MIT at that time understanding and receiving concerns about and by women. There were, at the Sloan School then, very few women faculty. I've been trying to remember how many – perhaps you know how many in 1973? But at MIT as a whole, there were 17 with formal faculty appointments. The proportion of administrative staff that were women was, I think, something like 20%. This is administrative staff, not support staff. The freshman class would have been something like 8% or 10% women. There were very few women, and of course that was exactly what Wiesner and Gray were addressing.

In any case, I asked for the title "Special Assistant for Women and Work," which was the first such title anywhere in the country, as far as we know. I was very glad of my early thought, that work process would have been an important thing to look at.

I first came to Sloan on a routine visit to the dean. My president and chancellor had encouraged me from the very first day to get to know all department heads, and of course, the dean of Sloan was the department head. I started with Bill Pounds and was entranced. I remember vividly that first hour or so I spent with him in that office, that now has disappeared, listening to his exposition of the School of Management, the differentiation of the School from a school of business. He was, with his ordinary, incredible graciousness, very interested in the request I had made: to have a charge with respect to work process, since managing work was in fact within his domain as well. We talked quite a lot about the recruitment and mentoring of women on the faculty, which was the specific topic that brought me over.

I don't remember much of that conversation, except for his very warm welcome, and the fact that I was particularly welcome each time we had a woman faculty person recruited, to meet that person. I spent what in retrospect was a fair amount of time coming over to Sloan, partly because I was very warmly welcomed, (even though it was a far walk from my central office!)

B: How long did this first assignment last? At some point, you moved into the role of Ombudsperson.

M: It was a process that I've written quite a lot about, in case it's of interest to either of you, my caseload, my visitor load from the first week, was half men and half women. Ninety people came to see me my first week – 45 of whom were men, including a former president of MIT, and 45 of whom were women. Each group comprised all of the possible cohorts of MIT, except, as I recall, post-docs. I'm not sure I met a post-doc. But I did meet custodians, and many faculty, etc.

Clarence Williams, was appointed a year later – one of my first acts was to ask for an African American counterpart, who proved to be Clarence Williams who was then Associate Dean of the Graduate School, as I remember. Clarence and I, from the beginning, saw everybody. He regularly saw a great many women; I regularly saw many people of color; both of us saw men and women.

It became fairly clear by the time Paul Gray was to succeed Jerry Wiesner that our titles needed to change from what it looked on the outside to be focused to one cohort. A point of amusement… in that first year Wiesner made it extremely clear to me in that first year, 1973, that he expected me to be totally impartial and I was not expected to be an advocate despite my title. I was quite delighted about this. But the oxymoronic nature of my title was a source of some mild confusion in the community, and some mild amusement and delight for me in the context that I was expected to see everybody and be impartial.

I should say – again, this is also recorded somewhere else – but Wiesner and Gray laid out six engineering specs for the job, four of which became the standards and practice for ombudsmen worldwide. There were ombudspeople in institutions as well as classical ombudsmen before I was appointed in 1973. There may have been a dozen in other colleges and universities, fairly classical in nature. But mine may have been the first, or perhaps the longest-lasting of those early offices, that was configured for survival within an organization.

The six parameters that they discussed were these.

- Wiesner and Gray expected me to be impartial. That charge became the standard and practice of *neutrality* for organizational ombudsmen when the standards of practice began to be drawn up about a decade later.
- From the outset, Wiesner expected that I would keep no case records and would be nearly absolutely *confidential* under circumstances where even then it was rather unusual. He felt from the very first, and from many conversations in my first year, that he wanted a "zero-barrier" office, where anybody would come, on any issue, from any cohort, at any time. That standard of practice became confidentiality, and it is quite commonplace now, around the world, that organizational ombudsmen keep no records. It's a best practice to keep no case records for the organization.

- The third standard of practice was that I was to report only to Wiesner and Gray. In a poignant conversation, before I took the job, it was clear that I had access immediately to the Corporation of MIT. That standard of practice for organizational ombudsmen is called *independence*. Ombuds are expected to report, and I quote: "independently of all ordinary line-and-staff offices." Again, this was extraordinarily unusual for the time, and I think OOs are now the only category in all employment relations in the US of a top manager-level person who does not represent the employer. Again, a sort of oxymoronic oddity, which comes up every once in a while.
- It became clear in my first year – it wasn't explicitly enunciated, but seemed to be understood – I had no management decision-making power. I didn't want it, and of course I didn't seek it. From the very first, as a stranger to MIT, I was dealing with managers at every level about any concern that came in. This question is somewhat consonant with the requirement of confidentiality. That standard of practice was termed by Wiesner "*no management decision-making power*" toward the end of my first year. Clarence and I got a formal instruction, I think in 1974 (though I'm going to check that), that we were (and I quote) "to get back to any manager whatever information that person would need to manage better that we could do, consonant with confidentiality." Neither of them were at all interested in annual reports, and they were not interested in case records, but they were VERY interested in the upward flow of information. That standard of practice now has the name of "*informality*", that we have no formal decision-making role within the organization.

- The fifth spec for the job, which never became a standard of practice but now has a name in conflict management systems, was the engineering concept of *redundancy*. Wiesner and Gray, from the outset, wanted problems to be able to get surfaced where they needed to be surfaced to get fixed, in as many channels, and as quickly, as possible. So, in a manner that was very distinct from a strict hierarchy where there is one manager who is in charge of each problem and everybody has to go to that manager, by contrast my bosses were imagining a redundant system. They used the word "redundancy" in the engineering sense of fail-safe, check and balance, and backup. That concept for Clarence and my offices never became a standard of practice, but it's now called "*multiple access points* in conflict management systems theory." When I began to write about conflict management systems in the 1970s, I called it "multiple access points," and that word has stuck throughout the worldwide literature on conflict management systems design.

- The final charge, which I'm hesitant to call a spec for the office, but which was a kind of ethos or moral imperative for the office, now has the name of "*diversity and inclusion*." Next year, I'm going back to Wiesner's papers, with permission from Rafael, to find out what words he used in 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974. But it was very clear that he, and very strongly backed by Paul Gray and then the then-Provost Rosenblith, and the then-head of Lincoln Laboratory, who was very important in this arena, that the four of those very senior people were completely committed to what we now would call diversity and inclusion.

In my first few years, I think in 1978, I wrote an informal report to I think Paul Gray, or maybe Wiesner and Gray, with at least 600 small and large changes in policies, procedures, and structures at MIT, a great many of which had been powered by or were the engine for change that had to do with inclusion and diversity—although they were almost always structured in a way to help everybody.

As a kind of poignant example, but one that was very clear to me in the illumination of what it was like to serve those two people: From the very first, the very few women faculty were concerned that the pension plans were unequal for men and women of similar service. I immediately went to Wiesner and Gray, along with all the other things that piled in. (And there were hundreds and hundreds of these issues in the first several years). The first reaction was, "But women will live longer." I then wrote a tongue-in-cheek note to Gray saying, "Okay, that's a principled basis for unequal pensions, but then our African American employees—and smokers—should get higher pensions at retirement because they aren't statistically going to live as long." That isn't what actually changed the pension plan. It was many women faculty, including Nan Friedlander and perhaps a Sloan faculty member, who helped but I'm not sure. Do you remember what year Phyllis Wallace came?

B: It was around 1975 or '76.

M: In that case, I'm correct because I did then go to Phyllis for help, as a very eminent economist and a practitioner and scholar WAY beyond anything I was ever to achieve or knew at age 36. I'm grateful to you for that memory, because I thought it was Phyllis and Nan. Of course, lots of people worked on it.

In 1978, when MIT changed the pension plan, it was after Paul Gray had led a completely thorough review of the benefits in MIT pensions, which brought a small but non-trivial increase in benefits for all males, and brought women into equity and equality, which was a significant increase for women. But the changeover was one that was structured—even in this situation where you might have thought that it could look like a zero sum game,—they did it via a thorough restructuring of the pension plan that benefitted everyone.

I tell you that example for various different reasons. One was that, long before I met you, Bob McKersie, I had the unbelievable good fortune of working for these two chief executive and operating officers, whose way of thinking about their interactions with their unions in the 1970s, their interactions with faculty, etc., always was, at first blush, a collaborative one.

I really was kind of an "ivory tower" applied researcher when I came at age 36. To learn my craft as a practitioner from these two people, and the others they inspired, like Director Gerald Dineen at Lincoln Laboratory, and from their view of what a complaint system should look like, was very comfortable for me. I never had wanted to be an advocate, although I was a feminist, and I somehow stumbled into a situation that was extraordinarily congruent with values that, for me, were largely implicit, but then grew to be explicit, as I began to write in the 1970s about what it was like to work with Wiesner and Gray.

Do you want to ask more questions?

A: I'm just interested, Mary, in the impartiality piece. You mentioned maybe a dozen universities that had ombuds functions. Were they impartial?

M: They were designated to be impartial or neutral. The classical ombudsman is impartial, but may come to a conclusion about a case and writes a report. The classical ombudsman, in the outer world and in Canada in universities, is an impartial person but an informal investigator. They are internal investigators who write a full report, which is considered different from the kind of formal investigation that MIT would do, but which is intended to provoke better practice by whoever the relevant managers are. Impartiality, yes, very much so, worldwide.

But organizational ombudsmen do not arbitrate nowadays. We would never do a formal investigation where the purpose is an administrative decision….. We do not accompany anybody in formal complaint processes, and do not appear as witnesses in formal complaint processes. We assert a privilege if called to court.

B: When you were first appointed, you didn't have the term ombudsperson. I know that generically you were functioning as an ombudsperson, and we all referred to you as an ombudsperson. But does the organizational chart use the term "ombudsperson" today?

M: Yes, from 1980 on. I was given the title Special Assistant for Women and Work, and mysteriously, I didn't realize how amazingly – Clarence and I were appointed *ex officio* faculty members. Do you remember whether he was on the Ex-Officio List with you, Alan? I'm pretty sure he was....

A: I think so.

M: I was so naïve in the ways of organizations that I had no idea that many of the doors that were opened by Wiesner would be of such colossal significance to me. Clarence and I were, from the first, given access to any information that MIT held, except in the rare case that it was curtailed by law, like healthcare records. The general premise—that a classical ombudsman has access to any records within the state or jurisdiction over which it has oversight—was applied to Clarence and me. We just didn't have a clue about how important that was. Neither Clarence nor I – I am confident that we never abused – we didn't usually use that privilege. With any dean or vice president, for example, I would always ask for the information I might need. In the cases early on, including some at Sloan, for a faculty member who was thought to be giving unfair grades to persons or color or women, those were relatively common complaints, not frequent, but common in the 1970s. I never went after the grades as a matter of right, but always asked for them as a matter of courtesy. I think I didn't even realize – and I know Clarence did the same – I don't think I ever realized exactly what I was doing, except that it obviously seemed more courteous and better relationship-building.

Back to titles: Special Assistant for Women and Work. They added the title Ombudsperson in 1980. Sloan added the title Adjunct Professor of Negotiation and Conflict Management in 1985. We were always *ex officio* faculty members from the beginning, as I recall, of the whole MIT faculty.

B: Staying with your role here, I know that you have provided leadership. As you said, this was not the first place to have the ombuds role, but I know that creation of a network, an association – can you say something about how that unfolded?

M: I was VERY lonely in the 1970s. Not in the sense of being alone. I was in great demand to speak, all over the country, and did so. I traveled quite a lot, speaking very happily on behalf of what MIT was doing in the areas we now call diversity and inclusion. But I didn't know anybody else just like me. In the 1970s, I began to meet some early experts and notable figures in the field of organizational conflict management. I met an editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, David Ewing, who wrote a lot. Several people who were passionate on the subject of individual rights – Alan Weston at Columbia, Professor Feliu – people like that were very interested in what I was doing. I had an intellectual network instantly, and especially among feminists, which was very heartwarming to me. I was able to meet any feminist anywhere in the world who spoke any English, from my first day in 1973, from this extraordinary platform that happenstance had given me.

But the oxymoronic nature of my work and title, and my own personal interests, were intertwined. It was always a relief to me that I was not an advocate. And…It was always deep in my soul that I was a feminist. I easily had many colleagues on the women's side. In fact, I formed a local Boston area group called W4, in 1973, Women Working With Women. There was a women's-associated woman in every local college and university by 1973, and we would meet at MIT. Some were radical feminists, some were in the medical department, some were chaplains; we were very few. As I remember, I liked every one of them a lot.

So, locally, I had a group to talk with. I did not socialize within MIT, so there weren't close friendships within MIT, although there were very close working relationships, as with Paul Gray. But in the piece of me that had to do with what we now think of as conflict management system design, I was really lonely. It was obvious to me that there was something desperately wrong about not having a systems approach to conflict management. (I was interested in each element of a system. I had been a little bit of a line manager. I had worked as a union member in Cleveland when I was 15, for a summer. I was very interested in labor relations at MIT and the collaborative nature of them.)

There were lots of questions about conflict management system design, which I wanted to talk about with people. But as I recall, I don't think I even discovered that there was something called an ombudsman in a college or university until maybe 1978. So for five years, I was thinking a whole lot, but didn't have a lot of people to talk with on this side.

Sloan people at that time, who were very useful to me, were all about unions. I came to Charlie Myers.....

A: Charlie Myers and Doug Brown?

M: I didn't know Doug Brown well. But I came to Charlie Myers perhaps once a year with lots of questions about complaint handling. He would give me books from his library about grievance guidance (which I have to this day, I have to give them back to Sloan). He helped me in any way he could, but he couldn't help me with where I was at. Fortunately, I had learned a little bit about organized labor at Columbia, while getting my PhD. Not very much, but a little bit. And a little bit about organized labor worldwide, because I had had a background in international relations. I think I knew what questions to ask about that segment of the working world. I was engaged in an (informal) set of conversations with outsiders like Weston and Felieu, and others. It was obvious to me that the organizational world was passionately interested in a system with elements at the lowest possible level of conflict management.

A few very helpful people sent me to a couple of labor stewards, whose names I didn't know, but I talked with each. I refer to them because they were the kind of steward of a union most of whose life was non-stop, informal, interest-based but also problem-based, grievance-based management. One of them prided himself on – I think what he told me was, "It's a failure if we have to go to arbitration."

I learned what I could, but I was really lonely. In 1980, I heard about a little group of Midwestern college and university ombuds types. We were ironically brought together by one of the very few of that ilk who was a passionate advocate, a very outspoken, African American ombudsman who was organizing ombudsmen to be a profession, and was very warmly welcoming. In any case, that summer I found my own "tribe," in a kind of funny way. We had a meeting that was (for whatever reasons) organized in a swimming pool with adjacent rooms, a kind of low-cost Midwestern motel. We must have spent 3 or 4 days together, and it transformed my life. I don't know long I would have stayed in the job if I hadn't had 'buddies.

I then realized that I was a neutral, I could join SPIDR as a neutral. I think I was the first ombud to join SPIDR and to say, "Look, there is a whole bunch of organizational neutrals you should pay attention to." It was a lot of fun to be with SPIDR and with ombuds across the US and increasingly in Canada.

I'm jumping ahead of myself. I kept finding organizational neutrals that popped up like a wheel getting reinvented. Somebody who had a job like mine in the 1920s, or in a mirror company in the 1930s. John Lewis, in the UK, the big Macy-like company. John Lewis had a *"Partner" in an ombuds-like office* put together by the founder in 1944. I suddenly, from 1980, realized that there have always been some organizations that had someone who was troubleshooting.

I then began to look very seriously worldwide. I'd lived in West Africa for a few years, which I'll add to this tale only because I was (for various reasons, when there) often in contact with tribal chiefs living around the Lagos area, probably all of them Yoruba. There was a kind of troubleshooter attached to every tribal chief I knew. I read up on the history of rabbinical courts before Christ, and there was a troubleshooter person attached.... I shouldn't use that word, I'm not meaning to be disrespectful, it was a position very common in rabbinical courts centuries ago, somebody who was meant to be impartial. I also read about the history of the "devil's advocate" in the Catholic Church, a person who is designated as an opposing advocate, but who serves the function of bringing an element of impartiality to very serious organizational actions.

I began in about 1980 to realize that almost all well-running organizations had somebody – maybe in organized labor, maybe the court jester in a medieval court – who had some ombuds-like functions. I began to study them as "functions", which I should have done from the outset, if I had followed my early Columbia training. I was constantly called by colleges and universities, but also corporations, government agencies. There was a time when I was consulting to 18 of the 80 federal law enforcement agencies to help them set up internal ombudsmen. Lots of corporations, a faith-based organization, a zoo in New York, the professional nurses association of Indiana.

During the 1980s, I began to understand better about what was special about this kind of job. I learned for sure that I wasn't alone in the universe, that it wasn't a fluke, that it could have a name, that it could have standards of practice, that it could have training. At some point in there (I can't remember the year), computers hit. Do you remember when the first ListServ happened? The first month that MIT permitted Listservs, I formed a listserv of all known organizational ombudspeople and people doing my kind of work worldwide. Of course, that was like growing an extra set of glasses, or ears, or something, for all of us. We all learned that most of what we were doing in our incredibly different gender/race/religion/ language/legal contexts or sectors, that we were all doing the same kind of work.

That started a big push on standards of practice. The first corporate ombudsmen group had come together in the President's office in 1982. There were 5 or 6 of us: Anheuser-Busch, Southland Corp (I think?), Bell Labs, a researcher from Wharton, and Clarence Williams and me. Then in 1983, the little group met a number of times. In 1984, there was the first large meeting of corporate ombudsmen that definitely included Southland. By that time, sustained by the listservs, we drew up a code of ethics and began to draw up standards of practice. For them, I was of use to them, because the specs that had been drawn up for my office were so incredibly useful.

Looking back over 42 years, my hypothesis is: all organizations have need of informal troubleshooters. That Wiesner and Gray uncannily picked the parameters that would be robust and lasting....

A: If I could just center on that point. What do you think brought them to that position? I can see where they felt there was a need for a position, but the way they did it, it is quite interesting the foresight they brought to that.

M: I think it was a Systems One decision. Do you know the nomenclature of System One, System Two decisions?

Contemporary neural science suggests the following: that most of our decision making is not available to our conscious thought. It isn't just that we don't know why we're doing it; it isn't even available to us, we don't and cannot know how or why we did it. What we're very good at is *rationalizing* after we make decisions, so it instantly seems to become apparent why we decided as we did. But at the time we order quiche, or design an element of conflict management, it's likely to be a System One decision in the back of the head maybe in the amygdala.

There are lots of words associated with decision making like this, like intuition. It gives neuro-scientific backing to the concept that you can fall in love at first sight, and that there is unconscious bias against those who are not of my tribe, etc. In real life, the unconscious decision-making part of the brain functions much faster than rational, considered decision making of the kind we teach people—on the basis of which we imagine that we should be making decisions, right? These two modes of decision-making loop together very quickly, so quickly that I will instantly tell you, I can give you a rationale about why I started with the salad and not the quiche. But actually, I don't know why I did. It's so obvious why there are many reasons why I might have that I can answer the question, "Why did I begin with salad?" But I don't know, and can't know, why I did.

Back to Wiesner and Gray. It was a System One decision for Wiesner, I think. I believe he was the first Jewish head of a very large research organization in the US. I'm not sure that that's true, because I don't know who the heads of the Bell Labs were. But probably, anyway, for universities. Many of my stories about Wiesner are early stories from which I learned what that experience had meant for him, for my work. I never had to explain anything to him about the nature of discrimination. He just got it. In the common parlance of American speech, "She gets it, she just doesn't get it?" you know this term? He just got it. I have lots of very funny stories about this, which if you want to interview me again, I'd be glad to tell you.

In the common discussion of conflict management about "should there be confidentiality?", for example, he just took for granted, "Of course there had to be confidentiality." It was me that gave the name "Zero Barrier" to my kind of office, but what he wanted was a zero-barrier office. He intuitively created a kind of "Pygmalion" directive and office, to which I gave names, conventionally trained as an economist. He supplied the engineering terms about systems, I an occasional word from economics (like *zero barrier*, and *micro-inequities*).

I have recently asked for permission to go into the presidential archives, which are otherwise sealed for 75 years, with permission that Rafael just, very graciously, granted me. I'm going to search for anything about what Wiesner was thinking in appointing Ben Snyder before me and appointing me. Some of it had to do with the fact that he wanted to address discrimination. But that clearly wasn't all of it.

Now, about Paul Gray. The question you've asked is one that perhaps the two of you, but certainly I, should be asking Paul right away. His memory is still quite clear for long ago, but like the rest of us, he's a bit forgetful about today.

What I saw of Paul Gray, who is only 4 years older than I, so he must have been 40 when he was appointed chancellor of MIT, he was among the most self-disciplined people I have ever known – far more so than Wiesner. There was, for me anyway, never any daylight between him and Wiesner during the period that I served them both. It was simply extraordinary, with very different people. I'm sure a lot of it was loyalty to Jerry, but Paul was working-class background, and he "got it," also about the nature of discrimination and classism. And….each of them married extraordinary wives.

I can't really answer this question, but I should be doing more than I have done. And I am next year. I will be working a day a week for the next two years on the history of all of this.

A: And a very important history.

B: Absolutely. George and I did interview Paul Gray, but we didn't get onto this topic.

M: He was an amazing boss! I think perhaps because he took it on so young, and perhaps for reasons that I don't know, but also he faced his own awful conflicts on the job in a way that Wiesner sometimes didn't let "get to him." Wiesner… you can see Obama must be terribly injured by some of the flak he gets, but he also grew up from childhood expecting it. Wiesner was not devastated by flak, that I ever knew. But Paul sometimes took it to heart. I think it also gave him sensitivity to the mundane pathology of all organizations. (All organizations have a lot of miserable stuff going on, out of sight.)

Paul knew the name of virtually everybody he would pass in the halls, and they knew him, because he's grown up at MIT and spoke right back.

A: He had such a tremendous sense of fairness. That always struck me....

M: Tremendous sense of fairness.

Do you want to invite me back? We haven't even got to Sloan.

B: While you're eating, let me make a couple of comments about some of the things you've said.

The System One/System Two is Kahneman's book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*

And your earlier comment – I'm sorry I wasn't here in the 1970s when you were talking about Charlie Myers, because there is a tradition of what's referred to as oral handling of grievances. Don't write things down. If you keep them oral, people will start to engage, and they don't get into a war of memos.

M: Yes, exactly so. Wiesner knew that intuitively, and I got words for it from Charlie.

What happened to me was that I taught in plain English, with no jargon, and then would begin to find a scholarly word or understanding like this from people who knew.... But I kept searching for why I was being told to do what I was being told to do. And you're exactly right. Wiesner and Gray wanted to get problems addressed rather than meting out punishment.

B: Before getting to Sloan School and your role here in many ways, back to more formal dispute resolution – can you say something about how you would interact with what would be, whether it's the HR Department at MIT, how your role intersected with the more formal institution of complaint management within HR.

M: Yes. First of all, remember back how long ago this was. We didn't have any grievance procedures for most non-union folks. We just had custom.

We had, in retrospect, a wonderful vice president for HR, named John Wynne. John was right out of central casting, a tall, handsome, white-haired....

A: Howard Johnson's man.....

M: Can I tell you a funny incident? I met John Wynne but I didn't know him, long before I got interested in MIT. I live on Linnaean Street in Cambridge, and a year or two before MIT got interested in me, and me in MIT, John Wynne got into some horrible difficulty in winter on Linnaean Street, I think probably just too much snow. My now-husband and I went out and helped him push out his car. I was very impressed by his extraordinary grace and civility and gave me his card. He had a personal manner that you would associate with Bob McKersie and Bill Pounds, even under horrible stress, at night, in a car mess.

He was however very distressed when I asked for the title of "Women and Work," and asked for a conversation with me. I went to his office – this was before I was offered or accepted the job – because he wanted to know what the boundaries were. I think he was probably persuaded, at least at System One, that I didn't want to manage anything, that I didn't see that as my role, and that I wasn't interested, and that I'm not by nature an advocate – although I was, a little bit to his worry, perhaps, a feminist. I think he was probably fairly uneasy, but my view of it (maybe I should ask to see John Wynne's papers, too), my view of it would have been that he was a staunch, wonderful, good colleague for me in an extraordinary way, and unmitigatedly so from my first days. Whether through profound loyalty as a good soldier, or because he decided I wasn't so bad after all, or why, I don't know. But he was very gracious to me. And it was sorely tested by 1974, because of AWARE, the unionizing group for support staff was unionizing at Harvard and BU and other places. I suspect, in retrospect, that he wondered if I was a union organizer? Or what kind of radical feminist I was?

Part of my life history I haven't told you about, was that in the building takeover at Harvard by radical feminists in 1971, 888 Memorial Drive was taken over by radical feminists in Cambridge and held for weeks. I was inadvertently a mediator for that. I wasn't a trained mediator, but I was a mediator for that Harvard building takeover.

I don't know what John Wynne thought of me when I came.

A: I think that boundary has always been confusing for a lot of people. That's why we had that session with you that time, remember? It was with senior staff and the head of HR?

M: Yes!

A to B We had the two ombuds as guests for a senior staff session to talk about – the whole idea was to try to understand about it, so that staff had some idea of where they could go for what. That was a very useful session, as I recall. I'm sure it was on Wynne's mind when you met him.

M: What I will tell you was, John was socialized a long time ago about issues such as gay/straight, about issues like unions, about issues like feminism. I don't know whether people with that socialization were more worried about unionization of the traditional kind, or were more worried about the untraditional unionization that women were pursuing. Maybe it was worry piled on worry, or maybe it was all one.

I think he was in fact worried about what I thought about the proper administration of institutions. But to my face and behind my back, so far as I know, he was absolutely helpful, supportive. We talked a lot. When AWARE came long, John (as of course he would have known) set up the Office Clerical Working Group, which has been of its kind perhaps the most successful thing of its kind anywhere in North America, including Canada. It was clearly an alternative to the union, but it was also set up and respected as if he really was going to listen to it—and he really listened to it—day by day and week by week. And to me. He would constantly say, "Have you any advice for me about how we can do better for the support staff?" (They were called bi-weeklies then, but I think it may have been he who changed that.).

If I went to his papers, which I'm now thinking perhaps I should, I might get some sense of his reasoning. It wasn't only a knee-jerk "stop the union" bit, because during the 1970s there was move after move after move to make the life of support staff here more reasonable. I can remember going to him in 1973 saying, "John, you know that our support staff are not in the telephone book. They are the only staff group left out." He put them in the telephone book.

Of the 600 or 800 changes in the 1970s, many of them had to do with support staff. I paid personally for the first nursing mother's pump at MIT. But it was John who got the room. If I cast my mind back, I would say that he was an extraordinarily effective and decent vice president. Anyway, he also chose heads of Personnel who were extraordinarily helpful to the ombuds's office, including Joan Rice, whom I think you probably knew.

B: OK, why don't we bring you into the Sloan School as adjunct professor, you said around 1985?

M: Let me first come to the Sloan School as an ombuds. My first forays with respect to diversity at the Sloan School were not all that happy. Not because Bill Pounds or any of his staff were discriminatory or miserable to deal with, far from it. But the early life for the first appointed women faculty was not equitable. There was story after story after story. I invited all MIT women faculty to my home throughout the 1970s – all 17 or 25. It was hard for almost all to be a woman faculty member. And it was very hard for them even just to meet together at Sloan. There was a time when the first three met together in the lobby and were going out to dinner together, and they were ribbed quite openly and loud about "Ohhh, here's trouble. What are you girls going to be doing?"

B: We have that on the record, that one of the persons to say that was Ed Roberts.

M: Well, the Ed Roberts' stories, which I won't put on the record, are several Ed, was blessed with an incredibly bright management daughter who brought him around a little… during her time here as a straight A.

The sexist discussions at Sloan were extraordinarily trying, and the racist ones of the same ilk.

A: And part of that was because we were dealing with older students in our executive programs, too. We had a lot of trouble with the Sloan Fellows, for example.

M: Yes, and then our first transgender, the only really bad transgender crisis at MIT, ever, was here at Sloan.

A: The Sloan Fellows program.

B: I was teaching that class. Stefan became Stephanie.

M: And Stephanie was very grateful, indeed, for the leadership of those who knew what was happening.

Let me tell you a Phyllis Wallace story, which you will appreciate. Do you remember that we had an HR/IR dinner group? Did you ever hear the story of her joining it, or being invited to it?

B: No. Charlie Myers presided over that group.

M: Right. Was there a woman on it before her? Perhaps, but not black.

In any case, she had heard about the group, and she had been here for a while. Let's imagine maybe, I'm making this up, in my imagination, she'd been here a year or two before she was invited. Somebody asked her for her resume to circulate to every member of that group before she was invited. Definitely not something that happened with white male invitees.

B: Wow!

M: My memory of that time with Sloan was full of stories like that. It was much better after Phyllis came, for a lot of reasons. But I remember a young black woman, a student, probably a graduate student at Sloan, coming to my office with a problem I don't remember, sent by Phyllis. I said, "What made you think of coming?"

She said, "Professor Wallace."

I said, "How did you meet Professor Wallace?" The student was in a completely different area of MIT.

She said, "Professor Wallace found me crying in the T station and came over to me and insisted that I make an appointment and talk with her. I finally explained to her the problem I was having at MIT. Professor Wallace sent me here." I remember lots of those stories.

B: You were also involved, in the 1980s, we had a series of seminars on sexual harassment? And was one of the trainers Freada?

M: Dr. Freada Klein, yes. An enormously effective diversity leader and author, thereafter co-founder of the Level Playing Field Institute in California..

B: You had something to do with the design of that the training.... I don't remember, do you, Alan?

M: Yes…., I asked for it.

It wasn't the first sexual harassment training at MIT, but it was the first made mandatory in Physics and Architecture and Urban Planning, and semi-mandatory elsewhere. Nobody knows for sure which, actually, was the first large organization in the world to use the term "sexual harassment" for policy and procedures and organizational structures. In 1973, I was definitely not the first person to use the *term* because I'd been in a local women's group in Cambridge from which I'm guessing I learned it, and I began to write about it at MIT in 1973. I have never found any other organization before MIT to have used the term. With W-4— Women Working With Women—and in traveling around the country, I was constantly the first person to raise the topic of sexual harassment in 1973.

Let me quickly tell the Wiesner story on sexual harassment. I went to Wiesner in 1973 and said, "Sir, we need a policy about sexual harassment and racial harassment." (We had none of the policies that we see now, of course). I had my writing pad. He said, "I don't think we're going to have a policy about sexual harassment or racial harassment," ….surprising me during a slowly bespoken sentence, while he thought. He said, "*Harassment* is not acceptable at MIT." He said, "Mary, harassment is absolutely antithetical to meritocracy, and so is favoritism. He used his hands I think: Here is the vector of meritocracy; here is the distortion of the vector by harassment; here is the distortion of the vector by favoritism. It has no place at MIT." It's just hard to imagine what that was like for me as a young and hopeful neophyte ombuds. This was seven years before the EEOC guidelines, (which later used some of his language.) Nowadays, I'm not sure that he was the first to use the language. I think it might have been in his head from earlier legislation about race, but he just went on to say, "Harassment is any behavior which has the intent or effect of unreasonable disruption of the educational and work environment here."

You see just this kind of language in the EEOC guidelines. In 1980, I thought it had been lifted from MIT because there had been many discussions; I had been in discussions from 1978 to 1980 in Washington DC about a presidential order, or legislation, or whatever. I thought it had been lifted from MIT, but I don't know for sure that that's the case.

I was pushing for harassment training from 1973. We had a lot of it, here and there and everywhere.

A word about Freada Klein. She wrote, so far as I know, the first or one of the first doctoral dissertations about sexual harassment in 1984. I was on her thesis committee at Brandeis; it was a very good, data-based thesis. She used Federal Merit Systems' Protection Board data. She then became the HR director of Lotus, which is where she met Mitch. She brought a pragmatic, feminist sensibility to Lotus, which was wonderful for me because there I was next door. The two of us, along with W4, were pushing on sexual harassment, sexual assault stuff, the training of MIT's police to be rape-trained. We worked with Boston Area Rape Crisis Committee. The EEOC guidelines, gave a huge lift to MIT's doing something more about sexual harassment.

A: But we had an incident here, and then we all were all required to go through that sexual harassment training.

M: Yes….. I'm trying to remember which was the dean? Was it Lester?

A: Lester, yes, and he was appalled by this whole thing.

B: I wanted to bring to the fore Mary's brilliant career in her teaching of negotiations, when you became an adjunct professor.

M: I’ve tried—I haven’t the right words to do this with the humility that I actually feel—, tried to explain that from ground zero I feel that I’ve been the recipient of the most fortunate education of any practitioner of my kind that I’ve ever heard of. Kind of stumbling from practice, to understanding what good practice is through theory. By 1980 – what year did you come, Bob?

B: 1980

M: By 1980, I turned into an ombudsman. I went to whoever was the dean then and said, “I need to know more about what it is that I’m doing.” I was sent to you.

A: That was Abe.

M: Yes, it was Abe that I went to. You came over to my office after swimming, and sat on what was then a couch in my office. It was, again, just the most extraordinary occurrence in my intellectual and practitioner’s life. It was another of the wonderful things that happened in 1980.

One of the things you did was give me a copy of Walton & McKersie, which was a real challenge for me. I tried very hard to read it the first year I got it. Then the year before I began to teach… did I ever tell you about the Christmas I spent before I began to teach Negotiations?

B: I think you have, but I’ve forgotten.

M: That holiday I read the whole book twice. I knew I was going to start teaching in February. I knew, because of the Program on Negotiations, and ombuds practice and SPIDR and listening to Bob……. I probably knew one-quarter of 1% of some fundamentals of the theory and language that I needed to acquire. I had set aside December 19 through the end of January to put together this course. I began with Walton & McKersie. I read it through, spellbound, painstakingly, once. It took me probably a week to get through it. It was by now, let's imagine, it's Christmas Day and my family is on my neck. They said, "You've got it now."

I said, "Not a bit of it. I don't understand any of this. I have to do the whole thing again." They said, "On Christmas vacation??" I said, "Yes, for sure."

I then read it through a second time and mapped it, producing "idiot" guidelines, which Bob has seen. The idiot guidelines were of course for myself. I quickly realized, in the mapping, that that which was described as "distributive," and that which was described as "collaborative," if you looked at it as a map—was an unbelievable diagnostic for young managers to know who they were dealing with when somebody would come in or when you were negotiating a commercial contract. If you could listen to people for these very subtle attributes... what were the "clothes" of the thinking of the person you were meeting.... that you could "diagnose" peoples' strategies…… about how they thought about conflict.

Because of you, Bob, in the 1980s, as I slowly sank into it, to realize that what ombudspeople and in-house mediators do – for that matter, arbitrators, although they have less chance – it's not just about dispute resolution. It's helping people understand where they are coming from, about conflict, before they get to the subject of a given conflict.

The Walton & McKersie structure brought this to the fore in part because they saw A and B each as negotiating with their own constituencies, as well as with each other. It also illuminated, for me, in some uncanny way, when I produced the idiot guidelines, that people weren't just negotiating about the content of a given negotiation, with each other and with their own constituencies, but that the very way that people conceptualized conflict was at the heart of their negotiating.

I read the whole blinking book through again. I turned my idiot guidelines into Negotiation 101, (and to my surprise and delight these neophyte guidelines were considered incredibly insightful.) I have lots of memories of learning, of teaching negotiations.

B: And you brought your own brand to the course, and taught in an innovative way.

M: Bob, you encouraged me. I'm sure I would have just jumped in the river if you hadn't done this. I was nonplussed by the formal teaching cases. I went and looked at Harvard cases and was panicked. And in the arena of work, of course, it was still a lot of labor negotiations, from which I could learn a lot but not teach what I was doing.

Anyway, you said to me in 1985, I think that's the right year, it might have been 1984, you said "Use your own case material." I don't know whether you remember having said something so amazing and earth-quaking, but it really made a difference to me. All the time I was here, I taught almost exclusively from case material as an ombudsman. That rescued me, of course, because I was then back on my territory.

B: You taught from, say, 1985 through when?

M: 2005. I was very nervous about the course, and stumbled into something else – or maybe somebody else gave me this good idea – I did a mid-course correction every semester. That is, I would ask the students, "Is this what you thought you were getting, and could we do anything differently?" I asked, on paper, anonymously. I mid-course corrected at least some, every year for the 20 years. I also revised the course every year, probably 10-20% on the basis of the evaluations at the end of the year. I had a lot to work with. I had no TA for the first 10 years, I had no TA of any kind. I never had a TA reading papers. I required three little papers, 2-3 page papers, during the course of a semester. I got to learn from my students how to teach. The idea I think came from Paul Gray— somebody whom I enormously respected.

Paul, by the way, was one of the most successful teachers MIT has ever had. He locked the door at the moment the class began— can you believe actually locking a door? He was pretty fierce. He said, "Mary, it's unbelievable how students will misunderstand you or take home a message that is 180 degrees off what you thought you expressed, and put together two things that you said had no relationship with each other." Paul may have given me the idea of the Little Papers. And you taught me to require journals. I was astounded, in a class of 40 students or so, how frequently I would discover that I had apparently espoused flying to the moon when I was suggesting walking around the corner. (After I saw that the first year, I didn't want anybody else reading the journals; I wanted to learn form them how to teach.)

Journals are often very personal, and they are a huge piece of teaching. It's a chance to ask more questions, or to say, "Well, I think is what the discussion was really about," or "I'm wondering if you would consider..."

I had a few students from the Kennedy School, by the way, who were genuine scholars in the way that our Masters students are not, who would go and read every book I suggested. I'd write in the journal saying, "You might want to go look at XX." They'd go read it and write about it in the next journal.

So to recap…. You, Bob McKersie, and Paul Gray, and the students in the course taught me a great deal more about my field and how to think about it. I had, as a practitioner, the uncanny experience of learning what it was I was doing in a way that probably most ombuds don't have.

B: It's 1:30. This has been an incredible journey we've taken. Alan, do you have anything else? What gaps have we missed?

A: Yes, we need another session. I wanted to get into what you feel you've learned from your work as an ombudsman, and what things you feel are left undone.

B: That's a topic. And your research work – we haven't talked at all about your interest in bystanders. You are a faculty member here, and you ought to talk about your research work too.

END OF INTERVIEW #1

INTERVIEW #2
WITH
MARY ROWE
November 10, 2014
Sloan Oral History Project

M: Mary Rowe
B: Bob McKersie
A: Alan White

B: We're doing our second interview with Mary Rowe. We're going to start with a couple of loose ends from the last session, Mary. As you were talking about the different presidents for whom you've worked, you mentioned that there were some really poignant interactions between you and Jerry Wiesner. We didn't have time to let you talk about those in detail. Do you want to give us some of those episodes?

M: You had been reminding me of a famous story, which is how I got my job. Perhaps I failed to tell you this the first time? You will recall that Wiesner and Gray had been asked by the women's community to have a special assistant for women. I in turn, had asked for the title Special Assistant to the President and Chancellor for Women and Work, reasoning that men as well as women have concerns about "work."

When I listened carefully for a month or two to the first men and women who came to my office, I was considerably bemused by the fact that no two of them seemed to have the same view on anything. Or at least, there weren't obvious patterns. I wondered what use I could be. I fell back on my training as an economist to "collect the data," so to speak. There were so many people coming through my office, I reasoned that my office itself was a kind of "bench" in scientific terms. Even though I didn't easily or brilliantly see patterns, I could collect the data and look for patterns. I wrote down a 2-3 sentence story for each person who came, and then laundered those sentences so that people couldn't be identified.

For everybody who came in I kept some notes– I don't think I had any interest at all—ever, and certainly not then—in keeping case records of the kind that clinicians think about.

But I was trying to collect data about what it was I could be learning about this institution—I kept cryptic notes.

As I recall, a formidable percentage of the first 600 people were men. I remember, the first week, 45 men and 45 women came to see me, of all cohorts, including a few people from our unionized service workers and a past president of MIT.

So, in what happened next, maybe because I wasn't sure at all what I use was, I was perhaps searching for some way to prove myself. But in any case, I made an appointment with Jerry Wiesner, whom I didn't really know. I had met him possibly 2-3 times, usually in formal settings. There was never a recruitment interview with him as there had been with Paul Gray.

I went to see him with a long laundry list composed of brief notes on those who had come to see me. As I recall, it included hundreds of interactions, and they were not grouped together. I think they were likely in chronological order, if anything. And I said, with some shy pleasure (I think I was pretty proud of this thing), "I thought you would like to know what I've been doing." Fortunately, as it turned out, this was toward the end of the day.

(By the way, in my research now, I'm very much hoping that I'm going to find that list. So far I've gone through about 10% of my records, finding all kinds of interesting things – including for your interest, if it's of some use to you – in 1988 I seem to have written up 5 pages about the beginnings of my work in the Ombuds office. I asked Katy to scan it so I could send that to you electronically. In any case, I'm hoping I'll find my marvelous 1973 list.)

Wiesner, as you may or may not know, was not a tall man. He was interpersonally not an imposing presence, and was often quite quiet. My own vision of the man was that he spent his entire life thinking in an extraordinary way. He thumbed through these many pages, my long list. And he was plainly not at all happy. I was inexperienced; I was so much an academic, a researcher, that it did not really occur to me that a CEO might have very little knowledge of the mundane pathology of all organizations. Wiesner really was not pleased. He wasn't going to push me at all about the identities of my visitors, but he did ask a question here or there, especially on one or another issue pertaining to the normal policies of MIT.

I recall that there was a professor who, under the table, had accepted tenure at MIT and another institution. I didn't realize that that wasn't acceptable – or at least not at the time. But there were points like that where he would check whether I had really meant what I had written. In any case, he was plainly more and more dismayed. Very troubled....and puzzled. Finally, it must have been about 5:30, (I had gone in to see him about 4:00) to my enormous relief, he came to the end of this document. He sat like this in his chair, looking at the floor. [Bob notes: Mary is now hunched over] I, of course, looked at the floor for at least 60 seconds – what was, for me, a very long period of time. Then he looked up, and he said kind of quizzically, "Mary, did MIT have any of these problems before *you* came??" [laughter]

B: And what was his facial expression?

M: I wasn't looking at him.

B: Was there a twinkle in his eye?

M: Very much so. But I think it took me a long moment to have the courage to look up.

Now, what I remember in 2014 is a little different than what I wrote in 1988, interestingly enough. In 1988, I wrote that there was a bit of real discussion with him about what should be done. Two or three years ago, when I was telling this story, I had forgotten that there was any kind of discussion. What I mainly remembered were the headlines.

I can faintly remember backing out of the room, very humble. I remember, at the door, saying to him, "Do you have any special instructions for me?"

He said, "Yes. Help each person as well as you can, consonant with the confidentiality of your position." There was a long pause, and I just waited. Then he said, "Mary, don't let any problem ever happen twice." (You can see he was an engineer.)

There is a little more in my 1988 paper about this, which will interest you. He was really a remarkable man. One of the things I remember about Wiesner took me very much aback – I don't know that I had had much really close contact in my life with anyone as brilliant as he.

I'd gone through Swarthmore and Columbia, and I was no stranger to very bright people. I was quite accustomed in the consulting firm to working with very, very bright people. But Wiesner had intelligence like that of Provost Francis Low and a few other people, he just wasn't on the charts.

The point that I am getting to, I remember most vividly from another discussion with him. I can't remember what the problem was. I think it was rather shortly into my first year. But much heartened by the fact that he didn't want to fire me on the spot the first time, I went back to see him with some kind of problem.

Again, it came at the end of the day. He listened carefully to the issue, which was a complex question. There was a long pause, and I waited quietly. My being a Quaker was helpful when dealing with Wiesner.... I was used to silence. He then began to run through what I'm going to imagine were probably 7 or 8, different, logically possible, organizational options for the problem I brought to him. I can't remember the problem, or the options, but he began metaphorically at the far lunatic left and then went to the far lunatic right, moseying over a couple of plausible, realistic options. Again, I didn't know this man very well, and I didn't realize he was doing what we now call "brainstorming," just in a brain of one person, every logical, possible possibility for dealing with this complex problem. He was quite used to doing this. It wasn't that he wanted any of the implausible options; I realized this when we settled on a couple of those options in the middle. (And I don't mean that the other options were lunatic in the technical sense, they were just improbably useless or awful options at one end of the spectrum and at the end. "Of course, we could fire (somebody)" for example.) Wiesner was just sorting through a wide landscape looking for solutions.

I think part of my vivid passion about offering options maybe came from that early discussion. The idea of options is also in Walton/McKersie. But the foundational practice of an organizational ombudsperson is not to take ownership of a problem that comes to him/her, but to develop options for the people who come to the office, to evaluate options; Wiesner was one of those who taught me. As I look back I see that this is part and parcel of Wiesner's vision of an integrated conflict management system, founded on options for constituents and for the organization, with some redundancy. Thus: for each person, one should always *think* about all one's options. For your organization, create conflict management options in your *system*, and, finally, charge your ombuds to offer options to individuals who call.

Did I talk last time about the four basic characteristics of an organizational ombuds, and the features…?

B: Yes, they were well developed. Before you leave Jerry Wiesner, I want to underscore something. He was the first president under whom you worked at MIT?

M: Yes.

B: It's amazing for you and the office and the whole function to have a president of that caliber to get started. I can picture somebody coming to another university, with a different kind of president, and being off on the sidelines and not really making a difference.

M: Well, neither Thomas nor Toni met very much with Charles Vest, almost not at all. And none of us ever met to discuss issues with Susan Hockfield. We met regularly with Rafael Reif because we knew him well as provost. But basically, the last three presidents haven't had the kind of time to do much mentoring of their ombuds. I'm affirming your point.

The other thing is, I've probably met and talked with at least a thousand different organizational ombudsmen over 40 years and from around the world. I consider myself unbelievably lucky. There are exceedingly few other ombuds – 2, 3, 4, or 5 – who have had anything like the chance that I was given with my first two Presidents.

A: You mentioned the many guidelines that you received from Wiesner. And then you boiled it down to four.

M: Thank you for that. And good for me for having remembered that it should be at least seven. The first four really stick out in my head because they became the Standards of Practice for my entire profession. I wasn't the first ombudsperson, but because I was so lonely and talked a lot with ombuds colleagues, and was trying to think how to practice better, some of the instructions I was given by Wiesner and Gray, little by little became the Standards of Practice for my profession, over the 1970s.

Another guideline is the question of *options*. Formal and informal options in the system, with some redundancy. and now known as "multiple access points." And also options for the ombuds to offer to constituents. That is, we don't decide something; we offer choices to anybody with a problem. That permits us to work with Persons A and B because we can offer all the logical, responsible options to either side, and also to some of the internal constituents for A's and B's positions. (I don't know what to call different people attached to a concern – we will call them Person A and Person B.)

With respect to a given concern, there may be several different people who are the initial visitors to the ombuds office. There might be various folks coming in with slightly different characterizations of the initial problem, as well as whoever would be the obvious responder, as well as the constituents for all sides. In 1973, you remember, I was given the guideline of "not giving advice." Ombuds were not counsel; we did not have management decision-making power: we were there to offer *options*. That's what permitted us to be, in effect, as neutral as a human being can be (working hard to preserve neutrality!).

It also quickly led to,…….. did I talk last time, about conflict management systems? About taking a system approach, with options for constituents and managers and some elements of redundancy?

B: Yes....

M: One of my bosses' guidelines was the idea of taking a *systems approach*. Wiesner and Gray relentlessly thought in terms of the whole institution and how to keep continuously improving in a systematic way. Did I talk about coordination of systems last time?

B: I don't think so.

M: OK, let me jump ahead then, because in the last 5-10 years, I have received many questions from organizational ombudsmen asking, “How do I prove my worth? If I’m of use to my organization, how can I demonstrate it?” (If you’re keeping no case records of whatever you’re doing, it is difficult to show your worth, in this era of metrics and measuring everything.)

I don’t know if I’ve shown these to you, Bob, but I have been collecting a list of the possible sources of value of an organizational ombudsperson—to an organization, and to the organizational complaint system. When I worked on this list, which you are welcome to have—it’s a compilation of things I’ve learned from you, and from practice, etc.—I began to think the about what a conflict management system actually looks like this..... I wish I could show you something from my office. Can I bring you something from my office? I can demonstrate it with my hands, a little.

B: Sure!

M: So, something that Bob would know quickly, and just translating the jargon for you Alan – it’s not a complicated idea. In a complex management system, say a complex organization system like MIT, there are probably 20 different offices that regularly deal with conflict management. Some of them deal with conflicts in terms of the *interests* of the people there. It might be the Chaplains, and the Medical department staff, and the affinity groups, and mentors, the ombudsmen. Some of them deal with *rights* – the general counsel, etc. A few of them deal in terms of *power* – the MIT Police, for example. So there is a wide range of conflict management functions, you’ll see on the graph I’ll bring you, of offices that deliver conflict-management services and other options—including centrally and most important, line management. [Note: see Figure 1 Analyzing your Conflict Management System.]

In the early 1970’s, listening to Wiesner and Gray, I came up with a name for integrating a conflict management system, an ICMS. Did I talk about this last time?

B: I’m not sure.

M: This was the time of neural networks and of Very Large-Scale Integration (VLSI) in engineering. I faintly remember a discussion with Paul Gray in the 1970s. Perhaps they were planning a VLSI center in the Engineering School. The idea in the discussions of Wiesner and Gray, what I took from it, was that if a problem was important then there should be a systems approach with many redundant options. I deduced that a choice of complaint handling options should be offered for managers and also for all users of the system, And further, you could integrate a conflict-management system within one organization, and should do so, since all systems approaches for important problems should be integrated, right?

Bob, with his engineering background, and Alan, I don't know your original discipline, you probably would have gotten the next point much faster than I did. Over the course of a couple of years, I think this was 1974, I came up with the name "ICMS" (Integrated Conflict Management System). It turns out that this wonderful idea, which has been adopted all over the world—and lots of organizations will tell you they have an ICMS—is, actually, oxymoronic. An oxymoron, you will remember, is two ideas that have been put together which can't coexist in the same time space.

An integration of a conflict management system can't really occur if there is a long list of offices, some of which deal mostly with power, some mostly with rights, some only with interests, and some with more than one of these categories. They don't *think* like each other. And in particular, no organization in the world has really resolved the problem about if you want to have an ICMS, how will it be structured and directed within an organization? To whom does it report? It's obvious, in organizational management, that everybody who works for the organization works for somebody. Everybody has his/her supervisors. Who are the supervisors for an ICMS? You have this group of informal complaint-handling people. And you have line managers, you have this whole array of rights and power complaint handlers, like compliance officers, as well as people thinking about interests and informal options.

It is a genuine dilemma, for the following reason: As an ombuds, I can't ethically report to a compliance officer. MIT has probably 14. The General Counsel, for example, or HR. These are compliance officers beholden to the Feds to keep data and report them. I can't do that because of my Standards of Practice. Some organizations have experimented with having conflict resolution services report to the ombudsman, but that doesn't work either because we ought not be supervising the rights- and power-based people who do keep records and have compliance duties. Supervision is only one of the problems, but it's one that is easily perceived.

A: I feel that one of the real problems is that it's so hard for the employees to understand this and know where to go about what. That's why, in that small way, we had that senior session that day with you and the director of HR, to try to help us understand when do we go to you? When do we go to HR? And why? That is just two pieces of the system. I'm in discussions with employees, and staff, and in my view it's confusing. It's hard to understand, and you're describing a system that is even more complex than most of us are aware of.

M: At 1:20 or earlier, I'll go get a few things from my office, in which I've tried to get at exactly that question. First of all, it is confusing and is hard to understand. On top of that, there are *many* offices. On top of that, the senior leadership turns over from time to time. Every time there is a new director of HR, of General Counsel, the question is: does that basically a compliance office or more than compliance? Many contemporary HR people have been brought up to believe, for perfectly good reasons, that their compliance duties are paramount because they must protect their organization. Fortunately at MIT right now, we have a VPHR and General Counsel and a Deputy GC who are very broad thinkers, who see interests *and* rights *and* power. Fortunately, my presidents have been generally ones who could see interests and rights and power. And you want line managers to be able to do that. But the confusion and the peculiarities that you discuss are a huge part of it. Now, we've added to that multiplicity, the fact of constant turnover.

There other issues also in integrating a system. One of them is turf consciousness. Many organizations in the world have somebody in the conflict management system who wants to own the whole blinking thing and will do anything they can to widen their turf. They may not notice that they are doing it, but you sometimes hear of a general counsel doing it, for example.

There's an extraordinary nationwide example of the difficulty in integrating a complaint system right now with regulations about Title IX, which appear to mandate formal processes for all concerns about sexual harassment. Fortunately college and university after college and university have discovered that sexual assault cannot be dealt with *solely* in terms of mandatory reporting and zero tolerance, but there are strong tensions about who may hear sexual harassment concerns and how.

Every organization that faces a potential zero tolerance issue has the problem that the rights and power people may want to own it or may think they have to own it. The people who are purely interest-based—including medics and chaplains and EAP people, social workers, and a lot of line managers, usually are very supportive of formal options but also are concerned about supporting complainants who do not want to use them. .

As an experiment, I asked some faculty at one of the faculty lunches a month ago, "If a student came and told you about a suite mate here, who apparently had been sexually assaulted, would you want to immediately report it?" The five people I went to, including one of our close colleagues, said "Of course not." Mandatory reporting is anathema to people who understand that real life conflict management has to include some process options....

You, Alan, would understand this in particular, because of your background in countries other than our own. If I came to you and said that a fundamentalist, devout Muslim woman had been sexually assaulted, and that she couldn't talk about it, you would immediately flash mentally to every place you've ever been in the world. But unless one has had that deep experience, compliance offices may lay claim to whatever is their all or nothing understanding of regulations.... right?

With respect to this list of offices in a conflict management system, (see Figure 1 below), there are two characteristics of conflict management systems that are very interesting to me right now. (I suppose that I have closely studied maybe 100 of them over the last 10 years.) The first is that offices on the list don't necessarily know that the others exist. That was part of what you put your finger on, Alan. They at least don't understand everything that the other offices do. In addition, many supervisors and managers do not feel that they are authorized to offer a wide range of options. They are only empowered to offer the option that they are delegated to work on.

What's curious now about the organizational ombudsperson is that we may become, de facto, an invisible, informal coordination device for a whole system. If you imagine a list of offices here, and a list of functions that each of them provide in conflict management, the ombuds office here on the chart will be offering the options of working with all of the other options. Here are offices interested primarily interests, or rights, or power—here is line management interested in all three; we offer them all for the choice of our visitors.

B: We have a diagram on the board. We will have a copy from Mary to go with the text.

M: Ombuds are constantly referring people, or trying to get them to work with and understand how to work with other managers—role-playing with them so they *can* work with—every other office in the system we have. We can't solve all problems on our own. We try to support people to learn how to solve problems, if possible, within the structure they have. It dawned on me 5-10 years ago that I had been spending my working life getting to know all of those in every office on the list, and referring visitors and responders to them. And, that this ombuds activity serves the function of informal, if invisible, coordination for the conflict management system. That's one of the things I'm writing about now.

B: Mary, would that be something that is more available to an ombudsperson who has been in the system or the Institute longer? Coordination is very difficult; you don't develop capital to do it very easily. I'm just trying to understand whether it's unique to MIT, or whether it's something that could be replicated with other ombuds people.

ANALYZING YOUR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Some Conflict Management Options

Some Conflict Management Offices	Interest-based																		Rights-and power-based						
Affirmative Action																									
Affinity Groups/Networks																									
Audit																									
Conflict Coaches/ Counselors																									
Conflict Management System Office/ Coordinator/Steering Committee																									
Disabilities																									
Disciplinary Office/Internal Affairs																									
Email/Online Harassment Officers																									
Employee Assistance/Social Workers																									
Employee Appeals Board																									
Environmental Hazards/Waste Hazards																									
Equal Opportunity																									
Ethics/Compliance																									
Executive Panels																									
Graduate Students Deans/Advisors																									
Hot Lines/Advice Lines/Idea Lines																									
Human Resources/Human Capital																									
Human Rights/Civil Rights																									
Human Subjects/ Animal Care																									
Inspection/Inspectors General																									
I.P./Patents/Copyrights																									
Legal Counsel/General Counsel																									
Line Management relevant to issue																									
Mediation Program																									
Medical /Nursing/ Fitness for Duty																									
Mentors/Peer Advisors																									
Model Workplace																									
Mortality/Morbidity																									
Ombudsman Office	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x							
Patient Ombudsman/Advocate																									
Quality Assurance Circles/Monitors																									
Race Relations/ Cultural Relations																									
Religious Counselors/ Chaplains																									
Residence Advisors/Managers																									
Risk Management																									
Safety/ EH&S Working Groups																									
Security/Campus Police																									
Sexual/Racial Harassment Advisors																									
Staff Associations																									
Undergraduate Dean/Advisors/Council																									
Unions, Stewards, Union Officials																									
Work/Family/Personal Life Programs																									
Working Groups/Councils																									

This graph appears as Figure 1: The Ombuds Office in a Conflict Management System, in "Organizational Ombudsman," by Mary Rowe and Randy Williams, *Cutting Edge Advances in Resolving Workplace Disputes*, The International Institute for Conflict Prevention and Resolution, NY, NY, 2014, pp 100-101.

M: That's wonderfully put, Bob. This is, of course, what we teach new ombuds to learn to do. For this purpose we teach about the sources of power that an ombuds has—including of course, information, and expertise, moral authority, the BATNA (or lack thereof) with each person in the system—but, most importantly: relationship, relationship, relationship.

Wiesner instructed Clarence Williams and me to get to know all of the relevant managers of MIT. He knew, from ground zero, that we needed to do it. When I began to understand the importance of the instruction, which of course I had followed dutifully, was later, with Bob Brown, then Provost. Bob was drawing up a list of people that every new department head had to meet with, and he drew up a list of five, of which the ombuds office was one, the Controller was one, the head of HR was one, I can't remember the other two. Probably OSP and the General Counsel. Wiesner had set me on the right path.

Your point is absolutely right. Now, how do we translate this into teaching new ombudsmen? We say, "You don't have the power to make decisions. You have the powers of relationship and moral authority, the powers of information, and expertise, and the power of commitment,—you must never give up." (As I recite these sources of power, I can see, looking backward, how negotiation theory gave form to my practice in uncanny ways.)

Managers here turn over, or get promoted or change portfolios every year. It's never-ending. And where two used to get along together, a new manager may not get along at all. Perhaps a line manager or faculty member used to get along with the head of OSP; the new line manager or faculty member may not like OSP. Ombuds are constantly trying to foster those relationships, not just between us and them, but between them and them.

This leads me to one more point about coordination. It took me a long time to realize that one of our principal gifts to our organization, if we could do it well, would be this: [pointing to coordination on a list of ombuds functions]. When you think of an ombudsperson as helping in dispute resolution, helping people in a conflict who have different views of what should happen, a great deal of what we do isn't just helping people resolve a conflict. It's dealing with offices and managers and students and staff who have different ideas *about* conflict and about how conflict should be managed.

I have a hypothesis that something like 5-15% of the people that I dealt with every year seemed to me to be basically interested in *formal* dispute resolution. If they weren't offered options for formal dispute resolution, they would think that MIT wasn't serious about the dealing with their problem. And some think, furthermore, that any manager who neglected a formal investigation and formal disposition of a problem was behaving in an unethical fashion.

B: It's only 15%?

M: I would have said probably not more.

B: Let me just build on that. A lot of people, where something has gone wrong, and their initial thought is, "I want resolution, restitution. I want justice. I want somebody to hear my case and side with me as I get restitution." That's why 15% seems low. I would guess that part of what you do is help them reframe the journey ahead, and not just into formal "I'm getting justice for my problem."

M: Funny you should mention this. First, I like your thought, first let me "approve your idea," and then disagree with it. In affirming your thought, let me mention the following: I meant to be imagining that the people with conflicts in an organization are talking about the *options* they will choose to follow, not how they may feel inside.

Inside themselves, this is why I would agree with you. I don't know the percentage of people who inside themselves really want the other guy to be killed. They might well be thinking: "X has no redeeming features, it was a mistake to hire him/her in the first place, and the institution should get rid of X." Probably all of us, especially when we are very angry, have those feelings at least a little. But, it's a small minority of people who would be willing, at first blush, to ask an ombuds for a rights- or power-based option. (Of course those who were sure they wanted a formal grievance might not have come to the ombuds anyway; another way wherein your intuition might be right.)

However, now let me disagree with your excellent thought. You are, I'm sure, familiar with the fact that anonymous surveys of normal populations of any kind that ask people

"Have you seen or suffered this {completely unacceptable behavior}?", you will get relatively large proportions of people who have seen or suffered it. But if you ask them "Did you *report* it?", only a small minority will have reported it formally. Even among those who report it formally, it is not everybody who would choose a formal option.

I don't know, Bob, what proportion of all of us—I can certainly put myself in this arena—have had the notion that Person X has no redeeming features and ought to be eliminated. People have that feeling a lot. But they do not necessarily want to take responsibility for asking for the demise of X.

Now to my experience as an ombudsman... I was quite concerned in 1980, when I asked formally that my title be changed from one that appeared to be an advocacy title (Women and Work) even if I was expected to be neutral and impartial. I wondered what would happen if I was not only given a neutral title, but it was cast in writing about the charge to the office, that this office was to be neutral. The question was: who would come see us if we were not advocates? It's possible that my experience thereafter is a selective experience only of people who are wanting or willing to talk with a neutral. But, obviously, a major proportion of people who come to this office are a bit angry or very angry. I think being really angry is different from whether they would choose a formal option. So my experience is that only maybe one in six or seven will even consider a formal option, at least at first blush. Some people will *later* choose a formal option if informal options have not worked, that's clearly true. But often enough an ombuds will privately think that a formal option would make sense and the visitor is unwilling to choose it.

Now, what's going on at the other end? I think there is also a small minority, maybe 15-20%, who naturally seek collaborative or accommodative modes at first blush. They might go toward rights and power only if there are years of suffering and the collaborative attempts haven't worked. There are certainly people who are "hard-wired" at this end of the spectrum, too, toward interests. This is a group who not only don't choose formal options readily, but sometimes cannot be persuaded even to think about them. I've had a deep and wide experience, across cultures, across cohorts, of people who simply would not listen to formal options.

How do we explain the experience of people who have been working in labor/ management and in dealing with grievances, and the experience of an ombudsperson? I think we get a very wide gamut – rather like..... I had this conversation with you once, in 1985, you and I were talking similar terms, Bob, and you said, "You know? The old stewards....." – this is what I thought I heard, you tell me if it's what you said – "The old stewards in days gone by, the really good stewards, were extraordinarily adaptive, interest-based conflict management experts." (Whether or not they are now permitted by the unions in 2014 to practice that way is unclear; I think it varies greatly from union to union.) Your point resonated a lot to me, because in the 1970s, the HR people at MIT, the best of them, almost always sought interest-based solutions. They weren't, fundamentally, thinking like compliance officers, or like judges.

I'm not sure what's true across the country, and if or how it's changed over 40 years, but my present view is that there have always been substantial groups on the spectrum who think very differently from each other about conflict. One principal source of value of an ombuds office is to help people deal with ideas *about* conflict as well as dealing with specific disputes. That's the other half of our service in coordination of a conflict management system—that we're constantly trying to help people at either end of that spectrum, to understand that the others exist.

B: OK, that's good.

Alan, you put very succinctly what we are hoping to have Mary talk about – what she learned and what are some of the things still to be done in this role. Mary, I know you have a couple other big topics up here on the board: micro-messages and mentoring.

M: I loved your mentioning the "concept of things yet to be done." That presupposes that we think they're possible! Despite the fact that my oxymoronic "integrated conflict management systems" words have been picked up all over the world, I'm not at all sure that integrated conflict management systems are possible. Here's another.... Did we talk about micro-inequities before?

B: No, we did not.

M: Fast-backward to 1973. As a young, research-oriented economist, I kind of expected at MIT to be working on big problems, like the pension plan, which indeed I worked on hard – have I talked about this? If you were to imagine identical twins, except that one is male and one is female?

A: We mentioned the piece about the pension plan, you did talk about that.... We were in it, but at a different level.

B: Right, because women live longer, they'd get paid less. That's what was said.

M: That story is particularly useful, I think... I worked on it from 1973 to 1977 with Professor Nan Friedlaender, an economist, and with many other women. (It was a clear demonstration of the notion that an ombudsperson not only has no management power, but that one person is not a critical mass in organizational change anyway. I remember vividly the discussions with the five people that did change the pension plan. Of course, it was not I who changed it.)

Anyway, I came in 1973 thinking I was going to work on big questions: daycare, obviously, because I'd been a daycare economist. But instead, most of the people on the long laundry list of my early visitors had apparently "small things" that bothered them.

Did I tell you about the case of the faculty woman who was up for promotion, and one of her referees brought the letter of reference for her promotion to her. Did I tell you the story?

B: No.

M: I have lots of stories. Just to illustrate micro-messages. Faculty woman X was up for promotion. The letters went out. As sometimes is the case, one of her referees sent her a copy of the letter he had written for her, with no comment, and she brought it in to show me. It was a wonderful letter of support. However, the letter that went out from MIT asked the referee as follows: "Dear Professor McKersie: Professor X is up for promotion. Could you rank her among all the other women in this field worldwide, and tell us a little bit about her contributions to our field, compared with those of all other women who are now in the field?"

The referee I'm sure had a sense of humor, and in this case he had perfectly followed the request of the department ranking X with all other *women*. In any case, obviously I was given permission to go back to the department head, and I asked what had happened. "Well," the department head said, "It's the first woman we have up for promotion. I told Josephine to send out letters to the referees."

"Josephine", the support staff person, asked me, "What do I do about the letter?"

I said to her, "Just change all of the "he's" to "she's" —which the support staff person had done.

OK. At the time, that wasn't illegal, and even now it could be thought to be just clueless, if horrible. On my first list of the hundreds of things I brought to Wiesner, there were many concerns with micro-messages like this. Did I not tell you any of these stories?

B & A: No.

M: Another case on that early list was about a woman who called me in a panic. An older employee, I think support staff, but possibly service staff, she had gone in to buy savings bonds. She was coming to MIT and she wanted to buy savings bonds. She called me and said, "Dr. Rowe, I'm not permitted to buy savings bonds."

I thought, "What???"

I said, "What is it that you do?"

She might have said something like, "I'm a custodian," let's say.

I thought, "We can't have a rule that custodians can't buy savings bonds."

I listened to her for about five minutes, and I couldn't quite get it. I said, "Do you have time tomorrow to just bring me the form that the MIT office is rejecting?"

She said, "I'd love to!" She was kind of shaking on the phone. Remember, this wasn't the time of cellphones, so she had to sneak away to make a phone call.

She came to my office around 7:00 the next night with a form. She said, “Look at it!!!!! I have to say whether I’m Miss or Mrs. and I told him I wouldn’t do it. And he said, ‘Well, then, you can’t buy savings bonds here. You must fill out the form.’”

Right?? I remember lots of such stories.

At the time, we had a wonderful professor – did I talk about Chet Pierce last time?

A: No.

M: Professor and Doctor Chester Pierce was and is a formidably famous psychiatrist, the first African American president of American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and the American Orthopsychiatric Association. In 1970, he had written a very important article about micro-aggressions. He was the first to use that term, which is now so popular. I went to see him before I took my job at MIT, and a couple of the things he taught me were very helpful. Among them were micro-aggressions.

I was, however, concerned about the term “micro-aggressions,” for several different reasons.

I was not concerned about the way Chet Pierce used it; his writing was and is completely brilliant, and so is the concept. But micro-aggressions, to him, were mainly about racism and generally conscious and aggressive racism. As he first talked about it, it appeared to me that a micro-aggression was likely to be a conscious slight, like pushing somebody off the sidewalk, or it was of the sort that a lawyer might say: “Mary, you knew, or *you should have known*, that that behavior of yours was aggressive,” right?

Maybe the lady who wanted to buy savings bonds, that might well have been a micro-aggression on the basis of sexism depending on how the man spoke. But the pension plan difference wasn’t necessarily a micro-aggression; it was allegedly based on principle. It just didn’t seem equitable. Falling back on my economic background, I came up with the term “micro-inequities.” I conceived of micro-inequities as a much larger set of negative micro-messages, in which micro-aggressions were a subset.

I spent a lot of time in 1973, thinking about micro-inequities and what to do about them. They were particularly difficult for me, for a couple different reasons. I'd lived in Africa, my godchildren at the time were African Americans. I had a deep commitment and interest in the thriving of all colors of human beings. But with regard to race and with regard to gender, I kept finding micro-inequities in *myself*. Did I tell you my classic story of this in 1973? About my son?

B: No.

M: What really set me off was when Tim was turning maybe 7, I took him to the Medical Department, to the Pediatrics Department, for a routine whatever-it-is you do with a 7-year-old boy. We got in there a little early and I looked through the glass panes and I could see that there was no one back in the physicians' offices. The receptionist had come in a little early and was sitting out front. I said, "Tim, we will have to wait. There isn't any doctor here yet."

Tim looked, and said, (it's hard for me to tell this story—to this day—without tearing up), he said, "How do you know that she's not a doctor? There is a woman sitting right there, how do you know that's not a doctor?" Tim was right. I did not know the doctors. The woman could in fact have been a doctor coming out front for a moment to the receptionist's desk. If that person had been male I might have wondered. The moment encapsulated for me the difficulty of unconscious bias. We didn't have the term then, "unconscious bias;" I think the terms I used were "covert or subtle discrimination" and "unconscious discrimination." But there I was, in my 30s, purportedly with a charge to do something about discrimination, finding unconscious discrimination everywhere, …..and also in me... There were plenty of micro-aggressions around, and I could tell you those stories for hours. But what was much more worrisome to me for myself were the micro-inequities, because …what were we to do about discrimination that was *unconscious*?

I finally came up, in 1973, with the notion of "micro-affirmations," in the following way. I kept looking for people, probably most of them white males, at that time, who were incredibly helpful with respect to discrimination, and bullying, and mean behavior of all kinds. I discovered the following things that are kind of interesting and also related, Alan, to your questions about "what's left to be done."

In the 1970s, there were here and there a few examples of people like Professor Al Hill, for example, who single-handedly recruited Blacks to the Department of Physics, when everybody said there were no Black physicists. But Al found them. Another was Dick Cartwright in Philosophy. There were no Blacks in Philosophy when Dick Cartwright became chair of the department. He called the heads of dozens of departments all over the country and said, "Do you have any Black students?" He had a private conversation with all his buddies. And recruited and recruited, successfully.

I began to think, "What does this mean, that an individual can make such a difference?? This was a time, also, when I was worried about the thriving of the junior faculty women. There were 17 women on the faculty when I came, most of them junior. I had been, as a young economist, taught about *role models*. I didn't tell you any of this?

B: You did mention the number of women, yes.

M: Did we talk about the beginning of mentoring programs?

B: No.

M: I'd been taught in graduate school about role modeling and was looking for role models—but who is a junior Black faculty member or a junior woman going to look at if there aren't any? This was in 1973. I got some autobiographies of Black scientists, and women scientists. Madame Curie, for example, and George Washington Carver. I discovered, of course, what everybody now knows, which is that each of those people had *mentors*. They didn't have to have role models of the same race and sex and sexual orientation; anybody could be a mentor including a junior person mentoring senior peers, etc. (That all led, by the way, to some wonderful research at Sloan, which I forgot to tell you about, about mentoring Blacks and women as done in the 1970s. I have that in my office as well.)

I was in a personal conundrum about micro-inequities caused by unconscious bias, and I was at the time also trying to think about what to do about mentoring. This was the early days of what we now think of as networks and affinity groups. (These are such commonplace ideas now that we taken them for granted.) I began to look at who were good mentors, who were good recruiters, which networks worked? The excellent department heads; how did they succeed, where no one else was finding Blacks and women??

I helped probably 40 or 50 little groups of women, little groups of persons of color, to form little affinity groups. Sometime in that year, I began to notice hundreds of little acts of opening doors for people, and little acts of helping people—that were affirming actions—happening in the affinity groups. I wondered, for about a year: is this the opposite of micro-inequities? (Obviously, micro-affirmations, in and of themselves, are useful anyway. So it was obvious that we wanted them in order to be mentoring and recruiting more.)

Then I realized that if any of us tries purposefully, to practice affirming behavior in every context, at least with respect to an issue like discrimination, that it could block a behavior we are trying to get rid of. It could block unconscious bias. If I carried with myself the notion of affirmatively trying to recruit and help others to thrive, then to the extent there were unconscious inequities working around in my brain, that they would be blocked.

B: Can I ask a question about networks? We had, somewhere in our interviews, this comment. I won't mention the name of the faculty member. This would be later on. A group of women faculty from the Sloan School were gathered in the lobby of E52 to go out and have dinner together. Up comes a male faculty member who says, "I want to express my concern about you folks gathering together."

M: That was reported at my house that very night. That was a time when I was inviting people to dinner. A micro-inequity, for sure. I'm sure that person told you that for a while the affinity groups would meet offsite and away from observation. And they still do.

B: Is that a kind of short-run issue until the networks become opened up and really part of the larger system? Clearly this faculty member....

A: [interrupts] I would think it would come and go. You mentioned Muslim women, for example. All of a sudden there would be heightened concern about housing.

M: Yes, MIT has probably 20 or 30 different nationalities of Muslim, and Muslims ranging from very secular to very devout. There are many affinity groups outside of the public eye.

It's only recently, in the last 2 years, that MIT has institutionalized the Employee Resource Groups (known as ERGs). You might not have read about them yet? Lincoln Lab, several years ago, re-started a completely new initiative on mentoring, on circle mentoring, and on affinity groups. The campus took it up two years ago. Toni Robinson, when she came to the Ombuds Office, had started systematically to invite persons of color, of all colors, to lunch, just to get to know each other. But it wasn't regularized until about two years ago when the ERGs became popular.

A: Well, Mary..... I've also been concerned about what I would call macro-inequities. One being, for example, the institution of tenure and the abuses that come from those who are tenured in an institution. I've witnessed some of these over the years, that just ..... Ohhh, they are really unfortunate.

M: Yes. It is, of course, built into all organizations of any type and any sector where joining the organization is a matter of invitation and not a matter of right. It occurs everywhere, these abuses have. I have a few lovely examples, in the stuff I'm digging out of my archives, of reference....

We had a tenure reference written by a professor who had been asked for a reference about one of his female students, and he wrote a reference including the sentence: "You can hire her if you want, but I'd rather have her body than her mind." It was, you can imagine, meant as a sort of positive reference? There, micro turns into macro, the point you're asking about. By the way, that's a very old, 1973 letter.

B: Alan also had the question about the unfinished agenda, the work in progress, some that you touched on.

M: Well, some nice things are happening at MIT, you know. We have the ERGs, we have – hugely affirmed by Tom Kochan when he was chair of the faculty – a deeply institutionalized mentoring program of a kind that makes the miserable things we've all witnessed much less likely, and also gives people formal and informal recourse to problems.

Ed Bertschinger has picked up on the micro-messages concerns. I forgot to put bystanders on the list. We can cover that if you like. Ed has picked up on micro-messages and micro-affirmations.

There is a zeitgeist, if you read the contemporary literature on micro-messages, the discussions of micro-messages country-wide switched from micro-aggressions to micro-inequities, for many years, and have now switched back to micro-*aggressions* with the polarization of the country on every issue. It's very hard to get people who are thinking about micro stuff even to consider the cheerful side. I get asked about once a week to give a lecture somewhere about micro-inequities, since I'm the "mother of micro-inequities," so to speak. And for the last 20 years, I have declined virtually all such invitations, maybe the last 30 years, unless I am to speak about affirmations. It is my hypothesis that talking about micro-*affirmations* is the only way we block the unconscious bias in ourselves.

One of the papers I'm writing now is everything that institutions can do institutionally to mitigate the effects of unconscious bias. MIT is now doing a great deal.

One of the things we need to do more of, I think, is not only to think deeply about unconscious bias, which is being discussed across the country right now, but how to deal with it.

With respect to bystanders.... Let's imagine that we're in a management education mode and we have a whole bunch of managers who are thinking about how to deal with all the issues that come up. We re-teach the mantra that says, "*Identify the issue, assess it, and manage it,*" right? We try to teach people to think about how to identify, assess and manage problems. What actually happens? Back to management education, we don't do very well on helping to surface and identify human problems, and we don't do very well at teaching how to manage the problems. We teach a great deal about how to *assess* the problems, perhaps because that is what our brains do so naturally...

I have a longstanding interest in bystanders, back to the 1980s. In fact, it was just about the time I began to teach negotiations, because I was realizing in the '80s that supervisors can't actually fix everything. (I had begun with the wonderful notion that VPs and deans would cure problems if only they knew about them. So, I was an ombudsman and if I identified a problem and brought it to the chief wizard, then the chief wizard would fix it.) But the problem is, very few people misbehave in front of a very good manager. It's outside that person's purview much of the time, which makes it hard for the manager to know what's happening or to assess it, and very hard to manage it because he/she doesn't have the facts that he/she needs.

I mused about this for at least ten years as an ombudsman. Then I began to think more about the people who came into my office, who have brought in difficult problems. Many of them of course were targets of bad behavior. But others of them were good folks, a lot of faculty and very good staff, who saw problems, as *bystanders*. They weren't in charge of whatever problem it was, but they perceived something happening, and wondered what they could do. I got very interested in bystanders as sources of help to organizations and the people in them.

I can speak rather succinctly about 20 years of bystander stuff; here are some headlines. The research on bystander behavior has given rise, not only in English but in many languages, to a term called the "bystander effect," which means not acting if you see something bad happening. It's the opposite of the Good Samaritan.

B: The Kitty Genovese....

M: Yes. Kitty Genovese gave rise to a generation of research on this. But it turns out to be a very old belief, for perhaps very good reason, that lots of people, lots of the time, will perceive bad things and even be very angry about them, but not report and not do anything about them. In England in particular, but all over Europe, the term "bystander" is a bad word. There are big signs all over London for gays now, saying "Don't be a bystander. ACT!" Right? Don't just be a do-nothing. In my office, both as people who came in to report a problem, and with respect to recognizing people who are wonderfully helpful at fixing a problem, I began to notice bystanders a lot.

I had an early story that has lurked in my mind for years. Did I tell you the story about John Wynne and an Academic Council meeting and somebody told a dirty joke?

A: No.

M: John Wynne looked like a Yankee Brahmin, very distinguished, rather formal, vice president for human resources, and a very able person. I was invited to an early Academic Council, and as we left the meeting one of the men made some very crass remark about sexual harassment, a remark which could have been construed as quite funny. It wasn't just a totally dreary remark, but it was very sexist. Wynne, who was in the group, and had been silent for the whole Academic Council meeting, who was perhaps 6'2" or more, turned around and said, austerely, "Gentleman, I think this is the kind of language we need never hear again at MIT." He was an active bystander.

I thought, "Wow!"

Anyway, I got interested in bystanders, and I began thinking more and more about their importance. At the same time I was noticing mentoring, I was noticing that a lot of good mentoring happens from bystanders as well as from assigned mentors. I developed the hypothesis that the principal constraint on very bad behavior by very powerful people was (and is) bystanders of those very people. Institutions find it extremely difficult to deal with tenured faculty who are bullies and charlatans. But some tenured faculty and senior deans can and do deal with them. Some of my favorite Wiesner stories are about his dealing with such people, as president. But some were just bystanders, like John Wynne in Academic Council.

I began studying bystanders and bystander behavior, and now, 25 years later, I think bystanders help a lot in identifying both exemplary behavior and terrible behavior. Interestingly enough, they deal well with a great deal of terrible behavior and foster a lot of exemplary behavior, in well-run organizations. People who act purely as bystanders do a huge amount of "management." That's my short overview of what I've been thinking about.

B: This is a different conception of how an organization runs, actually.

M: Yes. We all know about peer pressure, and we all see it in teenagers. What we haven't properly done is to put together what we know about peer influence, what Cialdini called "social proof." (We know, by the way, that social proof not only was identified by Cialdini doing his early research, but that we now know that it is located in the brain—neuroscience affirms Cialdini.) And…. weaving bystanders into our understanding of how organizations work, that's very interesting to me, particularly with respect to conflict.

B: What else? I think that has been amazing.

M: Let me get you a couple of things and I'll come right back.

[Mary returns]

A: We were just talking, and I was wondering if there was comprehensive book about being an ombudsperson?

M: Yes, there are several.

A: Have you participated in those? Or have you thought about putting together an updated version?

M: Well, here's the quick answer. When I came back to Sloan, I talked with Tom Kochan about what I should do. Tom is now my boss. Tom said I should concentrate on understanding ombudsmen and make bystanders a chapter therein. I'm more or less following his directive.

The first thing I have been doing in looking through my papers is to pull together everything I've written about ombudsmen. On the Ombuds office website, there were probably 30-40 articles, but I found a whole bunch more.

The quick answer to your question is: I have never written a book. I’ve written probably 60 articles about various aspects of conflict management systems and the ombuds role therein. One of the reasons that I talk with such enthusiasm about this stuff is that I’ve written two comprehensive articles in the last year or so, each with a colleague. A book came out a couple months ago called “*Cutting Edge Advances in Resolving Workplace Disputes*, in which I was asked to write an article about ombuds as a “cutting edge”. I chose the erstwhile American Express ombudsperson to write it with me because this was a book for corporations.

The other was a much more theoretical OUP book about organizational ombudsmen in a conflict management system, which I wrote together with an ombudsman from NIH, who is theoretically oriented, a social psychologist by training.

Those two articles are on the IWER website, and this chart up here is in the *Cutting Edge* book.

Back to books. There is one inadequate book that I won’t tell you about, which was written by somebody who did good research 30 years ago. But the lawyer who helped put OOs on the map wrote a book called *The Organizational Ombudsman* for the American Bar Association. I have a copy in the office which you’re welcome to look at. He published it about five years ago, and it’s everything a lawyer thinks about when defending an ombudsman and helping people understand them. That has helped the profession a lot.

I’ve been helping my profession put together a website for the International Ombudsmen Association, pulling together maybe 300 articles to categorize them, including my 60 or so. I’ve been an associate editor on the editorial board at the *Journal of the International Ombudsmen Association* for the last 10 years or so. I just stepped down. I have published 5-6 articles in the Journal in the last 5-6 years.

Here is a booklet on Mentoring derived from a Sloan thesis. Pat Garrison was MIT’s first affirmative action officer, and Bob Davis. They were both Sloan Fellows here. They did the first major study of how mentoring was different for people of color and females. I like to think that I helped a tiny bit Davis and Garrison get going.

A: Bob Davis from AT&T?

M: Yes. He's still alive I think. In fact, I corresponded with him a year or so ago. Pat Garrison, alas, just died. She became a hedge fund manager.

I think MIT ought really to make much of that study. It is an amazing study. The headlines of it are – and you can see why it appeals so much to me, because of the ideas in it about *options*. The headlines of their work was this: when we all grew up, we were told about mentoring that the (white male) mentor had a (white male) mentee in a sticky relationship, the mentor being maybe 5-10 years older than the junior. It was a unique, very tight relationship, sometimes so sticky that in order to get credit on his own the junior person had to spring free.

There was a Yale psychologist, Dan Levinson who wrote about the classic white male version of mentoring. It was clear in the 1970s to Wiesner—and to Pat Garrison—that this couldn't work for Blacks and women at the time. When Pat came over to be a Sloan Fellow, she was determined to look at very successful Blacks and very successful women, and look at a four-point matrix: White-Black-male-female – to describe the mentorship patterns of very successful persons.

The headlines were these. First, the mentoring functions reported, I think, by everybody, but especially by Blacks and women, was a *very wide variety of functions*, not just one function. Blacks and women sometimes got one function from or with one person, and one function from another person. The mentoring relationships reported by Blacks and women were very various, were very multiple, and continued for life. It was wonderful to hear Pat give the first presentations of this.

Nowadays the three of us might think, "Well, of course, that's what white males do also, *nowadays*."

It I were Schmittlein, or on the Sloan website, I'd make much of something like this. I thought it was just an incredible study.

A: Bob and I were talking this morning about Bill Pounds' work, and this paper he wrote on the process of problem finding, which I think is the only article he ever published. You talked about Herb Simon at Carnegie...

M: Yes! Herb Simon was very important to me.

A: Bill was a person who came into a leadership position with that orientation. And of course, Bill was someone who was very process oriented.

M: You know that I cherish Bill Pounds. I learned a lot from him. Have you interviewed him and did he talk all about it? Do you have a copy of that article? Could I read it?

A: Yes.

B: We interviewed him twice, but there is so much more that he has done as a problem-solver for different distressed units within MIT – you are familiar with some of those – as well as his role in governance with many institutions, both business and nonprofits.

M: He did a couple of specific things for me personally that were extraordinary.

B: We don't think he can sit down and do this on his own. We have to figure out how to get somebody to help interview and help write.

M: Could I ask him questions about how he helped me as a young woman?

B: Oh sure.

M: That would be fun.

B: It's all part of the journey here.

M: I remember very clearly meeting Bill Pounds in his office. I probably met with him in his deanship maybe six to a dozen times, but I learned a great deal from him and he was enormously helpful to me. Talk about friendly behavior.

B: Well, he continues to be that way. He’s in here almost every day of the week. Well, Mary, this has been very interesting and very solid ....

A: Yes, we were saying that it would be interesting to go deeper into your definition of coordination.

M: Well, I’ve just been writing about it. Each of the things we’ve talked about are things that I’ve been writing about. And …thank you to the two or you. This has been a signal honor.

END OF INTERVIEW