

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
JOHN VAN MAANEN
June 4, 2012
Sloan Oral History Series**

B: Bob McKersie
G: George Roth
J: John Van Maanen

G: It's June 4. This is Bob McKersie and George Roth interviewing John Van Maanen.

J: I arrived here in August 1972. I interviewed for three jobs. I was from University of California, Irvine, which nobody had ever heard of. One of my committee members at UCI, Lyman Porter ("Port") knew Ed Schein. They had met at the annual meeting of old Division 14 of the APA – this is prior to the rise of the Academy of Management. Most of the people in business schools who taught organizational behavior were trained as psychologists and went to Division 14 of the APA. For organization behavior and theory people, it was the equivalent of the Academy at the time.

Port apparently sat next to Ed at lunch during the meetings and told him he had a graduate student who was studying the police socialization process, "how people become cops," and Ed was apparently intrigued. Port also talked to Chris Argyris at those meetings and Chris too was interested in the work I was doing. Ed and Chris then agreed to split the cost of a ticket for me to come to Cambridge for job interviews, one at the Harvard Ed School where Chris taught and one at Sloan. I also had another job interview at Northwestern in the Communications School. Much to my surprise, I got offers from each place. I didn't want to go to Chicago because, well, it was Chicago. The trade off between the Ed School and the Management school was less important to me than the mere fact that Ed Schein was at Sloan and Ed's work on coercive persuasion and socialization was enormously attractive to me. I should also say that when I came to interview at MIT I felt I was meeting the authors of my entire bookcase. The famous faculty that had been at MIT were many: Warren Bennis, Jay Galbraith, Mason Haire, Alex Bavelas, Leon Festinger, Doug McGregor, Tom Lohdal, Milton Shaw, Kurt Lewin and others. OSG seemed to be at the cutting edge of organization theory and research. Of the faculty who were at the school when I arrived – Ed, David Kolb, Dick Beckhard, Irv Rubin, George

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

2

Farris, Tom Allen and others – all were carrying intriguing research projects and seemed to me to be the “hot group” of the day. To be a part of this group was certainly attractive to me if also a bit intimidating. However, I doubt I would have been hired unless Ed had been chair. I can’t imagine Mason Haire, the previous head of OSG would have hired me, or, for that matter, even Warren Bennis, who directed the group before Mason.

G: Why not?

J: I did stuff at that time that wouldn’t have been seen as fitting into the group’s research direction. I wasn’t clinical enough for some and I was not managerial or organizational enough for others. I didn’t particularly want to consult. Most of the group had legs in both those worlds. Warren had left MIT a few years before I came but his influence was still present and he visited the group with some regularity. We even did a book together in the late 1970s along with Ed and Fritz Steele.

B: Roughly what year would that have been?

J: I remember the year because I spent all my summers in California and I was driving back east with the family in late August – 1977 or 78. Warren had a place in Aspen and I remember spending a few days there. I thought we were going to work on the book. But that wasn’t what Warren wanted to do. Warren wanted to entertain. What a character! He must have changed his crisp white shirts three times each day. I was with Colleen and my son Casey. There was always a room full of people. He was part of this Aspen elite group. I felt like a fish out of water. We pulled up in an old Volkswagen bus. I had my drafts and notes. I was ready to sit down with Warren and go through them but we never did. The book, *Essays in Interpersonal Dynamics*, was published in 1979 as a set of six chapters, three by me and one each from Warren, Ed and Fritz.

B: What year did you get tenure?

J: Lotte and I came up in the same year and we both got tenure. I think it was 1978 or 1979

B: How were you seen in a disciplinary sense?

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

3

J: I think I was seen as a sociologist, and I sold myself as that too. My PhD committee at UCI included Bob Dubin and Jerry Kirk, both sociologists. Port was my Chair. Dubin was at the University of Chicago when Erving Goffman was a student and Bill Whyte, of *Street Corner Society* fame, was on the faculty. Bob turned me on to Chicago School sociology and the kind of fieldwork on which it was based. When I got to MIT, I quickly discovered that no one else did fieldwork. Ed came the closest but he was – and is – more a clinician. Fieldwork to Ed was largely interventions and interviews.

At any rate, I probably looked unusual on the management school job market of the day. When I came to MIT, my salary was \$11,000. There were no premiums at MIT for management school faculty. The school gave me \$600 to come across country. I thought this a fortune. My salary was actually less – a couple thousand less – than Harvard offered, and much less, maybe \$5,000 less, than what Northwestern offered. The Associate Dean at the time, Abe Siegel, told me: “We don’t pay a lot here. You come because this is the best place in the world for a young researcher to be.” (laughing). It was motivating. It made you want to come. So I came.

Another junior person was hired the next year, Ralph Katz. Lotte Bailyn was already here when I arrived. She had been a research associate for several years working with both Ed Schein and Phyllis Wallace on technical careers. Phyllis was then doing her alumni studies of MIT graduates. Unforgettably, when I came to MIT, I thought that Lotte was still a research associate – I didn’t realize she had been hired along with me that same year as a regular, tenure-track faculty. My obliviousness led to an unforgiveable *faux pas* later.

I was then slightly interested in, of all things, multi-dimensional scaling – a rather anthropological way of drawing out and identifying folk categories -- of people, of activities, of ideas, of fields, and so on. I thought it would be fun to scale our own faculty. So I passed out questionnaire to all the grad students on the 5th floor asking them to rank our OSG faculty in terms of tacit similarities. For example, students were asked to pick the least similar in a trio of names – “tell me who is the least similar among Ed Schein, Dick Beckhard and Tom Allen.” When the data were scaled, an n-dimensional distance matrix among the faculty could be created. There were about nine or ten faculty members included on the questionnaire. When I finished, I built a three-dimensional representation of the results using ping-pong balls with each

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

4

faculty member's name on them and hung the physical model of the results up in the lobby of the 5th floor showing how the faculty were clustered by the grad students. I used three dimensions to show the clusters of faculty as well as those who were the outliers. It hung for about 3 hours before people on the floor, senior people like Ed, Mason and even the Dean, Bill Pounds, as well as the grad students themselves, told me to get the 'goddamn thing down'. In my naiveté, I failed to see that seeing one's self publically displayed as, say, an 'outlier' might be disconcerting and hurtful. Or seeing one's self clustered among a certain set of fellow faculty members might not be entirely welcome. As I dimly recall, the three dimensions that seemed to order the clustering were 'status,' 'field,' and 'friendliness.' Worst of all, I left Lotte off the questionnaire because I didn't think she was then full-time faculty. But I was so stupid and self-absorbed that I never asked.

G: What did you teach and where was your office?

J: When I came I taught classes for the undergrads and taught grad students in a special program. At the time, the Sloan School had a degree program for state and local officials akin to a MPA a Masters of Public Administration. But they got an MS in management. It was an experimental and short-lived program, lasting something like five years. Sloan was looking for people to teach in that program. And since I'd studied police organizations, it seemed like a reasonable thing for me to do.

My office was next to Ed's on the 5th floor facing E60 rather than the river. Another *faux pas* of mine in those early years was that I used to hang out with the grad students. We would sit around in my office, sometimes late at night, chatting away, drinking beers and smoking. On occasion, Ed would come by and poke his head in to say hello. Eventually, Ed very gently asked me to take the partying elsewhere or at least tone it down. Needless to say I did. Smoking cigarettes was hardly the issue since it seemed everyone on the floor smoked at the time – in departmental meetings, in classrooms, in the wonderful but funky faculty club bar and restaurant, in the hallways. Ed smoked, Lotte smoked, Mason smoked, Abe smoked his cigars and our meetings were inevitably smoke-filled sessions – not healthy but convivial I must say.

B: That fits. And Doug McGregor probably had a pipe.

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

5

J: Doug McGregor had a pipe? Well, I don't know since Doug had died by the time I got here. But his legacy certainly remained. And Ed carried it on.

B: How did the group cohere? Did you have a weekly seminar?

J: We had a weekly seminar, much like we have now with a visitor usually coming in to speak or one of us presenting. But it wasn't all that cohesive a group. Ed and Mason didn't see eye-to-eye. And there was a young contingent – the Experiential Learning Group --which was Dave Kolb, Irv Rubin and Jim McIntyre. In 1974 or 1975, after I'd been here two years, three faculty members on the floor came up for tenure in the OSG group. All three went down. Dave Kolb didn't get tenure. George Ferris didn't get tenure, Irv Rubin didn't get tenure. A fourth, Jay Galbraith, who was on research leave when I arrived also didn't get tenure and never returned to MIT. I wasn't that aware of much of the scuttlebutt on these cases at the time but remember that the tension on the floor was palatable to say the least. I think the faculty whose tenure cases were denied felt like they weren't strongly supported by the OSG group. I wasn't privy to that. But my suspicion is they were partly right -- that they were not seen as first-rate researchers by the senior members of OSG even though they were carrying on OSG research interests of a clinical, applied sort that at least Ed and Dick Beckhard supported. But I think the work they did was not seen by the school more broadly as credible and appropriate research. Jay Galbraith's case was perhaps an exception to this since he did work more in keeping with traditional organization research but I never learned the specifics of his case.

B: So the opposition didn't come from the economists or some of the others?

J: I honestly don't know because I was junior and very naive about these things then. I just know that David Kolb had an office next to mine and when he didn't get tenure he was very upset and angry. He went into a deep funk and along with Irv Rubin showed up only to teach their classes. Both did well on leaving MIT. Dave went to Case Western and built a cottage industry around his learning style research. Irv wound up in Hawaii as a quite successful organizational consultant.

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

6

Where part of the group did cohere was around an interest in organizational careers. Ed, Lotte, and I shared a bunch of interests. Ed and I wrote together for the first three or four years I was here on organizational socialization. Then Lotte joined us when we got a big ONR -- Office of Naval Research -- grant that Ed spearheaded although we all were involved in writing proposals. ONR funded a lot of the research coming out of OSG. This was a continuation of the Navy's long-standing interest and support of organization studies and organization theory. Much of the good work done in the early days of the field was funded by ONR. Not just at MIT either. In fact, I drew on a little ONR money for my dissertation at UCI. At any rate, for about ten years, in the late 1970s and into the 1980s, ONR funded our career studies.

The early work I did at MIT was on socialization but was influenced by the occupational career studies that were done in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. This was Ed's area too but he was much more the social psychologist than I. Our mutual interest in socialization morphed into career studies. I think we felt we'd taken socialization about as far as we could take it. Ed did the psychology of it and I did the sociology of it. We wrote a fair share of papers. It was a pretty heady time. Our interest in socialization led to an interest in what might be called life-long socialization, one's career or work history. So we brought our socialization interests into career studies. That's when Lotte came in. And, with the ONR money, we could support PhD students. During the 1980s, our students included Debbie Kolb who wrote on the practice of state and federal labor mediators. Steve Barley studied technological changes in hospitals. Gideon Kunda looked at engineering culture. Toshi Kanai studied entrepreneurial networking and took all of what he picked up in OSG back to Japan and built a little scholarly empire around career studies. Nitin Nohria studied new business ventures and networks in the Boston area. Deborah Dougherty examined new product innovation. Lots of diverse studies but all resting on extensive fieldwork.

In the mid-1980s, the Academy of Management established a Careers Division to reflect the growth of interest in organizational careers. Career studies took off both in the U.S. and elsewhere. Our interests in OSG however turned away from careers per se to occupational and organizational cultures and the way work gets done in a variety of settings. Beyond Geert Hofstede's work, there was little interest in culture on the part of organizational researchers. It was mentioned by some but not carefully examined. Context was missing. Even Ed's superb and field-defining work -- his little textbook *Organizational Psychology* first published in 1969 -- was

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

7

far more psychology than organization.

What Lotte and I brought to the table I think was context, what Lotte calls phenomenon-driven research. I was interested in occupations. Lotte was interested in technical careers and how those technical careers were managed or mismanaged as well as what we now call work-life integration or lack thereof. It is hard to say how our specific interests morphed into studies of work cultures but they did. But we each went in different directions around the mid-1980s. I started writing about culture, but independent of Ed. Ed wrote *Organization Culture and Leadership* pretty much on his own. He had the DEC and Ciba-Geigy case examples in mind. I didn't contribute much to that effort other than commenting on drafts and chatting with Ed about it as the work took shape.

This was about the same time I wrote *Tales of the Field*. So my work went in another direction. We were both interested in culture, but from a rather different perspectives – he from a more clinical perspective, me from an ethnographic perspective. Ed kept assuring me that the two were linked together as a Venn Diagram. I couldn't exactly see the links and still have a little trouble blending the two, although I certainly appreciate the action and change perspective that lies behind much of Ed's work. A few years later, Lotte published *Breaking the Mold* that pretty much defined how work-life integration should be understood as well as studied. Professional and managerial careers, particular of women, were also on Lotte's agenda. This was an interest that took a practical bent at MIT – how to help the Institute hire, retain and promote more women in technical and scientific fields.

B: You mentioned earlier a group that did not get tenure. This opens the question as to who was and was not able to get tenure.

J: Well, as I said, Lotte and I both got tenure the same year. The next year Ralph Katz came up and went down. I still have second thoughts about that case and Ralph's contribution of the group because, by then, I was on the Personnel Committee and voting for or against tenure. The case came up after something of a break between Ed Schein and Ed Roberts and Tom Allen. Ed puts the break in terms of a quantitative/qualitative split. I don't think it was just that. I think they simply saw the world very differently. Tom and Ed Roberts were distancing themselves from OSG and did studies of R&D organizations that were quite positivistic and highly quantitative.

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

8

Ralph aligned himself with this group doing more or less traditional OB kinds of studies. Tom Allen's work was something of different sort but still very quantitative; taking an engineering approach to the communications problems he studied – similar to Ed Roberts as well.

So there was tension and you could feel it. With the exception of Dave Kolb and Irv Rubin, the people who didn't get tenure were those aligned with the R&D research group. I should mention Don Marquis too since he was around and influential in the school during this period. Don, a renowned psychologist, came to MIT with a long research resume and an interest in technology research and innovation. He was the former head of Social Sciences at University of Michigan. And he was supposedly a great fund-raiser.

B: Didn't he bring the NASA grant in?

J: I may be wrong but I don't think he actually brought in that specific NASA grant but he did head it up once it was awarded. He managed it once it was in. Ed Schein claimed that Don was not a particularly good administrator but a great fund-raiser. So I may be wrong in terms of who got the grant. I didn't know Don well. He died a year or two after I arrived. I think Don also got what is now the TIE group started during his time here. When Mason Haire -- who apparently got along with few other faculty members -- stepped down as the OSG head, he left OSG and went to the Strategy group. Tom never left OSG formally but he migrated in the TIE direction.

So OSG began splitting up in the 1970s. By the late 1970s it was done. And there were really two groups. Ralph was the last person in that period to come up for tenure. It was some years after until we had a successful tenure case. I don't think we got anybody tenured until Deborah came up. It was a long time.

B: So Deborah Ancona was the first, then?

J: I think so. There was a big gap. Bob Thomas came to OSG in the 1980s but didn't get tenure. That was a real shame, too. I think the school really missed a bet. Bob has moved on and does interesting stuff but he's not the researcher he could have been.

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

9

G: And he left a tenured position at Boston College.

J: I could kill myself. I talked him out of that position and said, "Look, you'll get through here. We'll have you up for tenure in a couple years." Eight years later, Bob left without getting through – a highly contested case. Deborah I think was already tenured by then and we'd also brought in John Carroll with tenure from the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle.

B: Deborah came from Dartmouth.

J: But she didn't come with tenure. She came here as a junior person and started her clock over. She really made her career here and didn't publish much during the three or four years she was at Dartmouth.

B: She went through a name change from maiden to married.

J: That's right. She came here as Deborah Gladstein and for a while we wondered who Deborah Ancona was. Who else? I'm trying to remember who else was around. I'm really blocking on it. Because surely we hired more people than just those I've mentioned.

B: Then we go fast forward to the make up of the group now, when you have Roberto, Kate and Ezra and so on.

J: OSG started moving from psychology and social psychology toward sociology in the 1980s and we've continued to do so as the presence of Roberto, Kate and Ezra demonstrate. The group has always been discipline based but the disciplines – sociology and psychology -- are now more balanced. Consider two of our recent junior hires, Denise Lewin-Loyd and Evan Apfelbaum. They're both solid social psychologists whose work is quite disciplined based. They are interested in management and organization but it is a secondary interest, not a primary one. But that's been consistent for the 40 years I've been around. It goes back to Eli Shapiro's notion of a discipline-based management school and the Sloan School's image of itself. At any rate, over the past 20 or so years, we've tried to balance psychology and sociology.

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

10

B: What about experiential learning, the clinical strand?

J: That's pretty much gone. It went partly because of school politics and policies. Our clinical side relied heavily on adjuncts in the 1960s and 70s. But the school decided to cut back the number of adjuncts and that slowly wiped out our clinical teaching.

B: To replace Dick Beckhard?

J: It wasn't just Dick that we lost. There were three or four people that were affected. Jim McIntyre, Ed Nevis and some others.

B: So that's a major inflection point, isn't it?

J: It's a major inflection point, but it was policy-driven by the school in the sense that senior lecturers and adjuncts generally were de-valued. Dick was probably in his late sixties when the policy changed. After that he didn't want any part of being here even though we would have fought to keep his courses alive. He headed a very strong but only modestly popular consulting track for the masters' students, the planned change track.

B: Ed Nevis also taught a course like that. We don't have a course like that any more.

J: After Ed Nevis, I taught planned change for awhile in the 1990s. It was Ed Schein's course originally. But our faculty was thin and the school was growing. The demand to teach core classes and large electives grew and grew and grew. We no longer could justify teaching small experiential classes to 10 or 15 students. The only small elective classes we could afford to teach for probably the last 15 years have been Ph.D. classes. So what used to be a pretty broad offering of Organization Studies courses in our various teaching programs is now rather thin -- really just our main core courses, an elective or two each year like Deborah's Teams class, some leadership workshops, and the various highly-focused SIPs. When we can free up a class, senior faculty want to do PhD seminars if they can -- even though the point-system that determines our teaching

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

11

load discourages us from taking on a PhD class.

B: Has the focus of interest on the part of Ph.D. students also changed over the decades...

J: I think so. There's always been a small set who were drawn to fieldwork. George, you were one of them. But of your cohort, George, you were one of maybe two or three students and overlapped with, what, eight or nine others? Most were supervised by Ed, Lotte or me, and we all, in different ways, encouraged fieldwork. Those who wanted to do more "traditional" or empirical survey work were drawn to different faculty. These days, Roberto, John, Emilio, and Ezra play that role. We also are now lucky to have Kate Kellogg as our own as well as Susan Silbey from the Anthropology Department in the OSG orbit. In earlier times, Don Schön from Urban Planning contributed a good deal to OSG.

B: Oh, Don Schön, of course.

J: Don used to come over a lot and play a role in our teaching. Like Susan, he was on some of our Ph.D. committees, kind of an honorary member of the group. These cross-school affiliations have been helpful. Jerry Rein, from Urban Planning, was another. He studied public organizations and was an important urban studies person with a strong interest in public sector organizations. Ben Schneider also connected to OSG in the 1970s. Ben wrote *The Hidden Curriculum* and headed up an internal research group at MIT. When I came, this was a very exciting group -- an education research group. He was a psychologist, but really more of an anthropologist. *The Hidden Curriculum* was about MIT undergraduate education, what students learn outside the classroom. He was also a strong advocate of experiential learning. Then MIT killed Ben's unit for some reason. Or they simply ran out of money. They didn't have a teaching program. But it was a pretty healthy, active, interesting research group. They also were pushing for more experiential learning at MIT, so they were supportive of Dave Kolb's work. Dave, for a while in the late 1960s taught what was probably the only experiential learning course at MIT. The course wasn't really a lab course in the sense that of our lab courses are today, basically project courses. Dave's course at the time had students teaching other students, working through a text full of experiential exercises, and self-designing their own development or educational

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

12

plan.

There's a rumor that Alex Bavelas taught the first experiential learning course at Sloan. Bavelas was a rather famous social psychologist who studied communication networks and, along with Kurt Lewin, established the group dynamics lab at MIT in the late 1940s and 1950s. Alex was teaching 15.311. He apparently walked in on the first day of the class and said "I am Professor Bavelas. I teach organization behavior. Figure out what you want to know and when you've figured that out, come see me." And then he walked out of the classroom leaving the students stunned. This tale is also told with Warren Bennis as the main character.

G: That sounds like an apocryphal story!

J: I don't know if it's an apocryphal or not but when I came here it was a story told over and over with either Bennis or Bavelas as the teacher., At any rate, Kolb's 311 class, as I said, was experiential learning on steroids. Kolb and his colleagues Irv Rubin and Jim McIntyre used material from their 1971 textbook *Organizational Psychology: An Experiential Approach*. Basically the course was self-taught. There was no reading list. Students got the text and, in small groups, did the exercises described in the text. Some were straight forward T-Group exercises. And this went for a full semester. It was a required course and emotionally intense and raw. Kolb came out of Leary's shop at Harvard. He studied with Tim Leary and George Albert who later became Baba Ram Dass. He used to talk about the LSD experiments done at Harvard in the 'sixties. When he came to Sloan it was during a period of educational experimentation.

When I came in 1972, it was still in full swing – from open and free-wheeling classrooms to student designed curricula. Authority was out and participation was in ... at least in OSG. Some of the faculty in OSG – notably Ed and Dick – were key figures at NTL – the National Training Laboratory in Bethal, Maine. At the time, NTL was quite influential as a kind of practice oriented organizational and group dynamics laboratory that developed a number of innovative and highly experiential teaching techniques. The power lab came out of NTL as did T-Groups. A good deal of the material Ed put into his *Process Consultation* books came from the time he spent at NTL.

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

13

B: I think when I got here in 1980, the T-Group methodology was a big piece.

J: Dick Beckhard carried it on both with the master's programs and with our senior executive programs but it was no longer a required course.

B: I remember I was teaching Sloan Fellows in another course, a course other than you or others were teaching, which was heavily T-group activity.

J: They threw me into T-Groups from the beginning. I came here in 1972 and in the fall of the next year, Dick and Ed had me out at the Endicott House with the Senior Executives running T-groups. And boy, it was intense. We did a week long T-Group at the beginning of the program and working alongside Ed or Dick I felt like the Sorcerer's Apprentice.

B: So we abandoned the T-Group and experiential learning, or phased it away. For what reason?

J: Well, one reason is that we lost our adjunct positions. We lost the people able to run T-Groups. As the tenure policies and research worlds in general made clear, the use and study of T-Groups would never be a respectable research area. It was more of a social movement and the movement eventually faded. T-Groups began to be seen as coercive. Social psychology was moving away increasingly from clinical and normative approaches to the cognitive and behavioral. The 1960s were over by the 1980s. T-Groups came straight out of the 1960s. Also, I think Ed lost interest in it too and he was by far the most influential OSG faculty member in the school. His ties with NTL weakened as he became more interested in careers and culture than in group process. His consulting work became more intensive. So he wasn't running T-Groups anymore for senior executives but off talking to Ken Olson at DEC and general managers at Ciba-Geigy.

G: His process consultation work?

J: I don't mean to say Ed abandoned his process consultation interests but he became more focused on culture per se in the 1980s and '90s than with group process. Although his process work certainly remains a big part of his legacy at MIT, in OSG, and the organizational research

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

14

world generally.

B: George, you want to follow up anything before we wrap up? This has been terrific, John.

J: This is really fun. What it reveals however are big holes in my memory.

G: The things I have to follow up would take us too far back. So I'll come back to them later.
Let's keep going.

J: What I'd like to do is figure out who was there in that interim in the 1970s and '80s. Who were the other junior faculty who came and left? I remember a wonderful black woman we hired in the '80s – I really liked her.

G: Oh! Ella Belle.

J: Yes, Ella Belle. She came from the clinical tradition. She didn't exactly do T-Groups but she emphasized the role of emotion in groups and studied diversity and the lack thereof in organizations. I think Ella had her Associate Professor review here but never came up for tenure. She went on to have a successful academic career.

B: North Carolina, was it?

J: Yes. North Carolina State I think.

J: Here's another name, Paul Carlisle. He was here for about eight or nine years and then moved successfully over to BU.

G: What is your view of the impact of OSG on the MBA program, the major program here...

J: I don't think we've had an enormous influence. We did have impact during the radical, experiential teaching period in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But that didn't last long. After that

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

15

I think our influence was minimal for a long period of time. In fact, we struggled with bad ratings. The students hated the behavioral courses, our core 311 class in particular. They said, “Why do we have to take this? Give us more strategy or more finance. What does this soft stuff have to do with management?”

When our course began to have impact again was around 2000. A group of us – Deborah Ancona, Tom Kochan, Maureen Scully, Eleanor Westney and myself – decided to redesign 311 from the ground up. So we restructured the curriculum. It is worth noting that this redesign team was a multidisciplinary one – a couple of us from OSG, Tom from IR and Eleanor from Strategy. While we all thought pretty much alike in terms of what needed to be in the course, we we did come from different groups in the school giving the course an integrated feel that had always been lacking in 311.

B: You got a book out of it.

J: Yes. We wrote a textbook based on the redesign. Sort of like what Kolb, Rubin and McIntyre did in the early ‘70s although, needless to say, our text was very different. But we did help to restructure the Masters program and put a team-based change project into the middle of our course. The project became something of a model for many of the action learning and lab classes the school now offers.

G: And if you get the alumni newsletters, they really have put a lot on action learning in there – and are really pushing action learning as a distinctive mark of the MBA program at MIT.

J: Yes. My no doubt biased view is that this emphasis on action learning grew straight out of our redesign and rethinking of 311. Team projects had of course always been present at Sloan but they were usually associated with elective not core classes. Part of the motivation for our project orientation was a widely circulated critique of our program saying at the time that Sloan MBAs weren’t good team players. They were good at analysis but weak in social skills. We tried to address this directly by trying to provide some team building skills and making this a key part of the course content. And we figured what better way to do this than by requiring a semester long

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

16

team project complete with faculty serving as team advisors and coaches.

G: Let me ask you a related question, because I wandered there. Peter Senge has had a huge impact on management. Peter was a system dynamics guy who wrote a good book that pulled together all the OD stuff that people have been doing for a long time and packaged it in a way that had a big impact. And I think he contributed to some of this, too.

J: Indirectly, yes. Peter wasn't on the 311 redesign team. Nor did he teach any the core courses in the school – although, for years, he would do a session or two for the Sloan Fellows and several other core classes as a guest lecturer. But he did take on a good deal of elective teaching in Sloan. When the *Fifth Discipline* came out in 1990, Peter was around a lot and heading up the Center for Organization Learning at MIT. By 2000, his popularity outside academic circles was enormous and he was on the guru circuit. His Center had moved off-campus and became more of a consulting than research group. His influence on OSG and the work we were doing is hard to determine. Certainly we all profited from his celebrity in the sense that it drew attention to the school, to traditional OSG interests, and to some of the research that was taking place here. Without doubt, Peter has interests and characteristics that resemble Ed Schein's. He has a clinical side and works comfortably and well with senior executives. Today, he is a kind of Davos figure. And I must say he was quite influential in helping Deborah and others build up the Leadership Center at Sloan and had a strong hand in developing the MIT leadership model

G Did that draw on what was going on in 311?

J: Not really. The leadership model and center came after our reworking 311. The leadership work was done partly because the Dean's asked for it, "Give us a leadership model. We have to teach leadership since everyone else is doing it." OSG was thought to be the natural group in the school to accomplish this, but, like our course redesign group, Deborah wisely put a cross-department team together including herself, Peter, Tom Malone and Wanda Orlikowski and they stepped up to the task and delivered. This was about seven or eight years ago.

B: Did that follow the Leaders From Manufacturing?

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

17

J: Not really The leadership part of the LFM program took more of an industrial relations, IWER, approach. Bob Thomas originally had the lead and then Jan Klein took over. Those are the people I see as central to the LFM program. I taught in the LFM program too during its early days, when it was just getting started -- partly because Don Rosenfield was running the program and I liked Don and partly because it was a brand new program and you could experiment. Bob picked the course up from me and did a lot of remarkably innovative stuff.

B: That was a kind of test bed, in some ways.

J: It was. A lot of what Bob did, I still do. Some of it we took from Ed Schein and the old group dynamics exercises that came out of our planned change classes of the 1960s and 1970s. .

B: I didn't mean to interrupt your answer to the question about when did the Dean ask for this leadership within the Sloan School.

J: 2004 or 5 is a good guess. It may have been earlier. At first, nobody wanted to do it. All of us said, "Leadership? Who wants to teach leadership? We don't teach leadership here. Leadership is not a respectable research area." But, as I said, Deborah and others stepped up and organized a group. Peter got involved. They developed a first-rate leadership workshop. Peter doesn't do much of it any more. But the leadership model and workshops have probably been more influential in the school than *The Fifth Discipline*. Peter's teaching for years in the System Dynamics group certainly had influence as well since he brought a strong behavioral orientation to the field. John Sterman who led the group was sympathetic and worked well with Peter. But Peter never had tenure track appointment to my knowledge. John was the first person to be tenured in System Dynamics, a field that Jay Forrester founded and almost single-handedly built. But Jay never pushed for senior System Dynamics faculty until John came along. And there was also more than a little resentment if not disdain for the field coming from the economics faculty who didn't think much of System Dynamics as a research domain.

B: ...or didn't agree with Jay Forrester's theory....

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

18

J: Right. They didn't agree with Jay's version of System Dynamics and his aversion to economics. John managed to put together a very respectable research portfolio that was dynamite. Nobody could overlook it. So he was tenured. He's very different than Peter yet they can and do work well together.

G: John took the academic road and Peter took a consultant's path. The reason I say that is for many years Peter taught workshops with colleagues outside and had a company. He was doing OD workshops even though there was a kind of system view to it. But it was mostly organizational development stuff.

J: Right. The ladder of inference and the left-hand column exercise, for example, come straight out of the OD literature.

G: There was an organizational learning group for a period, that had Chris Argyris, Ed Schein, Peter Senge, and Bill Isaacs involved. I tried to get into it, and they wouldn't let me. Ed, as my advisor, said, "Don't study learning. Study change. It's too complicated."

J: Yeah. I remember that that group.

G: The Sloan curriculum, with its focus on action learning, has drawn from some foundational organizational learning approaches.

J: Weren't you part of that seminar we used to run, the Action Learning seminar, where we all had to present, there was very little reading and we taped everything. It had a little bit of an encounter group feel to it?

G: The clinical seminar that Ed ran?

J: It had different names. It may have been Action Learning one year and Learning Organizations the next year. Once it was called Clinical Approach to Field Work. Basically, we

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

19

would just come together and talked about whatever we were currently doing and the conversation went in all sorts of directions. Ed kept it focused through his process consulting side.

G: I think some of those preceded me. There were some I did afterward when we used that method for the Learning Center, when it was here, when we had projects to get people in, and to engage the community. Have people say, "What are you trying to accomplish?" And then have people follow up.

J: Yeah, yeah. There were a lot of crazy classes we taught.

G: There was greater diversity than what's available to students now. I'm curious what you think drives that.

J: What drives it is to my mind the growth of the school, growth in the student population. We now have 800 MBAs wandering around here at any one time. 220 EMBA's. 100-plus Sloan Fellows, an MSMS program, an Mfin Program and on and on. Not to mention what is now a huge and eclectic mix of executive education programs.

G: Wouldn't growth, though, suggest an opportunity to do more?

J: Growth was always premised on the notion that we would also grow the faculty. I haven't seen much growth of the faculty. I've seen enormous growth of the student population. And OSG has always had to offer a core class in every one of these programs. So we do. We staff them. But then we don't have time to do much of anything else. A lot of those experiential and experimental courses of yesteryear were in fact faculty sinecures. "I'm gonna be teaching an experimental class." Other faculty would come and we'd sit in together with Ph.D. students and we'd get credit for teaching a course. Basically we were trying out our ideas and playing with stuff. You can't do that anymore.

B: We also dropped the teaching load, at some point.

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

20

J: That's true. When I came, all faculty had to teach four classes each year. It didn't matter what size the class but you were required to teach four.

B: Now, with the point system, you can get down to two courses.

J: Yes. You can even get down to one if you have a lot of points in the bank.

B: Yes. So there was free time for research, but not using the capacity for elective courses.

J: That's right. So when we're asked why don't we teach this or that anymore there are very good reasons why we don't.

G: Yes, that was one of the questions I wanted to come back to. Will the point system change teaching? In some ways, it seems that it ...

J: It already has changed our teaching but in some unpredictable ways. The unintended consequences of the point system are pretty interesting. None of us predicted that the diversity of the offerings would be reduced. Or that we'd all wind up doing mostly core classes and no electives.

G: Was this behavioral response at all predicted? If you start measuring something, then the measurement becomes the goal. Is that what's happened?

J: Yes, I think so. We knew that the reward system would have heavy influence. But we didn't know exactly what the influence would be. We now over-measure teaching and people being people take advantage of the system to reduce their teaching loads. Ostensibly, we should be seeing a research productivity gain but that is far harder to measure – at least in terms of quality. I think the point system has worked just the way Bob said. It has reduced the teaching load. It has privileged some groups over other groups. It's made the burden of teaching a lot lighter on some and heavier on others. We're now in this new building but it seems so empty. Why is there

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

21

nobody in the building? Nobody's teaching.

G: Meaning that they're not doing these experimental classes...

J: Exactly.

G: One year I took your fieldwork class.

J: That was fun. I loved teaching it. But remember in those days I got credit for doing it.

G: At that time you would, but now you wouldn't?

J: Now I wouldn't get any credit at all. Unless I put some minimum number of butts on chairs. And the only way I'd do that is to teach something that was broadly appealing across the school. And that's not likely to be an experimental, first-time out class, or a fieldwork course. We do have some PhD courses that are 'protected' but there are few of them and the points you get for teaching these classes do not come close to equaling the effort you put in.

G: So the culture becomes "Why do it?"

J: Yep. I suppose those are the new rules given there are options for the use of your time.

G: So instead you could be going out and doing fieldwork as opposed to teaching fieldwork.

J: Or writing. Or staying home to read and write. Or doing an executive ed program and getting paid for it. Exec Ed was nothing when I came here. We had one Senior Executive program that involved a few faculty and that's all there was. There was no extra pay but we did get teaching credit.

B: Do you get extra compensation for the EMBA?

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

22

J: Yes. The deans would no doubt like to see it otherwise but there's no other way we could do all the teaching that's required given the size of our faculty. Everyone it seems is fully booked. And then not everyone can teach Exec Ed successfully so the pool of EMBA faculty is really quite small. The MBAs are not an easy group to teach and they expect a lot. You can't bring in junior faculty to do the job. It's not the equivalent of MBA teaching. It's going to be tougher as the program expands. But it seems as if the growth of the school depends mostly on Exec Ed.

B: The BP program would be in the same category?

J: Yes, I'd put BP in the same category, along with Vale and Li and Fung programs to name some others.

B: Extra compensation in these programs?

J: Yes. Although I must say that company programs are a little more fun than some of the regular degree programs. "Fun" maybe not the right word.

B: Stimulating?

J: Yes. You learn more because you learn about the organization from many perspectives and the programs run for years. There are the people from the company that sponsor and participate in these programs who you see continuously, over and over. So you develop a relationship with them. I've known the people who run the BP program now for seven or eight years. I've done other projects for them. It's been very interesting. I've learned a lot. You don't quite get that with the Sloan Fellows or MBAs. Although you do build a relationship with some, it's more a student/faculty relationship as opposed to a peer relationship.

B: We're getting near the time you need to go, John.

J: Okay.

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

23

G: I want to add some on projects. Were there projects when you came here that the faculty were doing? We heard about Calcutta.

J: Calcutta had just ended when I got here. The Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta that we helped get started was I think in the early or mid-1960s and ran for maybe five or so years. I remember Peter Gil had just gotten back from working in Calcutta. He was Bill Pounds's Associate Dean. I remember hearing about Calcutta from Peter but I didn't get involved. Too junior. But there were several other institution building programs as well..The ones I remember came much later. I got involved in the NTU program.

B: Singapore?

J: Yes. The technical university in Singapore. I went over there several times to help them get a few classes started. I remember working up a version of our 311 class for Singapore, complete with projects and a group process orientation. Where else have I been? Lately, I've been involved in the NOVA-Catholica program in Lisbon.

G: The reason I was asking is, those kinds of projects create opportunities to know somebody in a different ways. That has a way to then potentially to influence who you work with and what you do.

J: Those projects I mentioned that were with universities may have been more interesting than the company-based project work I've done that comes out of our Executive Education programs.

G: I have one last question to wrap up. You mentioned at the very beginning that MIT told you: "We don't pay a lot." And that was kind of attractive. Could you explain more what you mean by that?

J: I guess money's not the thing for me. But when I came to interview, I was probably more concerned about the feel of the place and whether or not I'd fit in and be comfortable. I must have been trying to figure out what was the culture was like? Harvard seemed to be full of itself

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

24

and people talked about all the contacts I'd have and the perks that went with teaching there. Even in the Ed School. The students seemed to be more interested in status, connections, and influence than in ideas and research. Coming away from my job interview, I had the feeling that the students – even the Ph.D. students -- were very career focused, asking questions like, “Well, what can you do for me? How are you going to help me get a good job?” I didn't have very good answers to questions like those. But I didn't have that feeling at all at MIT. I just had the feeling that this was a very research-y place and people were really more interested in what you thought and how you did your work than they were about how famous you were or what you could do for them. They were skeptical and judgmental of course, but the standards were very high. You didn't come here because you were going to have a high-falutin' lifestyle or put up with the airs and pretensions I felt were present at Harvard. I had never spent much time on the East Coast. The first time I came to Cambridge was for my job interview. But Cambridge reminded me of Berkeley and that was great. And MIT in particular had a totally different feel than Harvard – looser, more open, kind of a back-packing crowd, a place where I thought I could be comfortable. What I didn't realize when I first came to Sloan was the broader MIT culture that I was inhaling. I thought it was the OSG culture. Would I feel it again today? I don't know. I'd like to think I would.

G: What I'm just curious about is the presence, and teaching courses, and being engaged is what changes people, is what OSG contributes to management education. I wonder if that has gone away with point systems.

J: Oh, there's no question in my mind that much of it has gone away. We've become very instrumental about teaching -- and how to minimize it because we can't play with it anymore.

G: The rewards are for research. The really maybe great teaching or maybe it's just all packaged in 311, now and a few SIPs. And what does it do for the students that leave here, and they're ability to be successful?

J: A good deal of it has gone into Exec Ed. It's rather boiled-down and packaged however. In the distant past, we weren't packaging anything. We were trying stuff out. A lot of what we tried

Int. w/J. VanMaanen
6/4/12

25

out was awful but some of it worked and we're still using it. But now it's not as playful anymore.

B: John, this has been terrific.

J: This was fun.

G: I'm going to go ahead and turn this off.