

OSWC 1998 Report

Organization Science Winter Conf LO17187 - Report

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The fourth annual Organization Science Winter Conference (OSWC) continued the tradition of exploring cutting-edge issues facing organizations. The theme for this year's conference was "Organizations and Knowledge: Creating New Meaning". Fifty academics and practitioners spent January 2nd through the 5th in Keystone, CO engaging in discussions, debates and arguments about the current understanding of Organizations and Knowledge. Some of the specific topics are noted below, but realize that this is just a small subset of the research, application, and process innovations that were presented throughout the conference.

Session topics included (a full copy of the program and abstracts is available on the OSWC web site):

* Organizations and Knowledge: Overview Session

- * Organizational Boundary Setting & Collective Perspectives
- * Internal Knowledge
- * Knowledge Workers
- * Critical Activities and Processes

To understand this conference it is useful to appreciate that these session topics were designed to raise issues and focus ideas, rather than provide a forum for traditional presentations. We also continued the practice started in earlier conferences of using Roundtable discussions to explore specific issues in more depth. In this session, each table discussed a separate issue regarding Organizations and Knowledge (e.g., complexity theory, narratives, economic-based views), with participants having the option to rotate to more than one table. We also used for the first time an informal poster session that provided presenters the opportunity to report results from studies or to explore an issue in greater detail than is possible in the general sessions.

The link between practice and theory was this year once again central to many of the sessions with the presence of senior managers from major U.S. and international businesses. One of the highlights of the conference was a "fireside" chat featuring John Seely Brown (Xerox PARC), Susanne Kelly (Citibank) and Larry Prusak (IBM) discussing "Knowledge, Knowing and

Organizations" in their respective companies. The wide-ranging and informal session in which the panel presented their views and fielded questions from the audience reflected the conference's hallmark efforts to understand the interaction between the practice and theory of organizations.

Because the conference seeks to start rather than end conversations, the last day participants spent time working in groups discussing the current state of our understanding and the issues that need to be addressed. One of the later sessions was devoted to developing a draft "call for papers" for a special issue of Organization Science. (John Seely Brown, Bruce Kogut, Arie Lewin and Larry Prusak have since been selected as guest editors.) Also, from the conference emerged the decision to use the Fall 1998 INFORMS meetings for the next stage in developing our understanding of "Knowledge, Knowing and Organizations" and to help authors prepare for the Organization Science special issue. For more information about the Fall meetings, please contact Jacqueline Meszaros (meszaros@u.washington.edu). This process of using the Winter Conference and Fall INFORMS meetings to develop new research parallels that recently used to develop ideas for applying complexity theory to organization science (please see the initial call in Organization Science, 7:1).

A special event concluded the events. Arie Lewin was honored for his service to Organization Science by the creation of the Lewin Spirit Award. This award acknowledges a Winter Conference participant who models the goals of innovation, insight, and facilitation. Bruce Kogut received the inaugural award.

In conclusion, the Organization Science Winter Conference emphasized the creation of idea-generating interaction informed by practice (in the conference, on the ski lift, and during "off-line" discussions). The organizers and participants continue to take risks on topics, disciplines, and formats. If you are interested in the 1999 OSWC, the theme of which is "Negotiating Shoals of Chaotic Environments", please see the Call for Participation on the web site (<http://www.gsm.uci.edu/~olk/oswc/>), or in the upcoming issue of Organization Science.

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Conference Steering Committee:

Arie Y. Lewin, Editor-in-Chief, Organization Science

Richard L. Daft, Associate Editor-in-Chief, Organization Science

Kaye Schoonhoven, Incoming Editor-in-Chief, Organization Science

Terri Griffith, Convenor

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