INTERVIEW WITH
MICHAEL SCOTT MORTON
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Sloan Oral History Series

B: BOB MCKERSIE
G: GEORGE ROTH
M: MICHAEL SCOTT MORTON

B: Let me identify our good friend here, Michael Scott Morton. It's Monday, April 2.

G: This is George Roth, joining Bob.

M: And Michael's here also.

B: The logical place to start, Michael, is to say a few words about when you came to the school and what brought you here. What were some of the pull factors that brought you to the then Sloan School?

M: It's interesting because it's complete blind fortuitous chance in the sense that I was doing my doctorate at Harvard Business School, and I had an idea, which was triggered by exactly the wrong motivation for my dissertation. I was working for a professor who shall remain nameless who wrote an article that said computers cannot, will not, and should not ever be used by managers, ever. And I said, "Rubbish," and set out to prove him wrong. I moved to a new thesis chairman en route. Harvard did not have the technology required for my experiment. MIT did have it, but I couldn't use it unless I was a student or a faculty member. I didn't want to be a student again because I already was one. So I

applied for a job on the faculty and got it. It was in accounting.

B: What year was that, Michael?

M: That was 1966. Howard Johnson had left the deanship the year before. Bill was about to start but wasn't there yet. So I was interviewed by the acting dean, Eli Shapiro and Tom Hill.

M: Zenon Zannetos and Tom Hill were hiring in accounting. And there was, as always, a shortage of people who could teach accounting. I think there may have been some last-minute hiccups at the Sloan School end that caused them to be looking at the last minute. But I came over, interviewed, and the attraction was the computer link. So I could teach accounting, but I would also have the computer technology to do my thesis (These were the 'ARDS' terminal and time sharing.). The Sloan School was saying, "You're also interested in the MIS department." MIS and accounting were tied together in those days, with Don Carroll.

B: Don Carroll was the acting dean?

M: No, was one of the Information System people at that point, so he was involved as well. But I was hired. I came to teach accounting but I was given just one accounting course that term, and that was it until the next year. Then I taught the various levels of accounting, and Management control systems.

        Then I began teaching information systems and other computer technology material and was involved in the early discussions with Stu Madnick, about coming to Sloan. So we started.
        At that point, for junior faculty, you were very segmented by function. There was very little crossing subgroups from my perspective as a junior faculty. I was in accounting and information technology. And then information technology split off and was not

part of accounting, so I went the MIS route and developed what became Decision Support Systems, with Tom Gerrity as my first Doctoral student. This had links with Operations Management initially. (He later went on to found a company Index Systems and later to become Dean of the Wharton School).

G: Where was your office?

M: In the "neo-Nazi ski lodge," the Herman building. It's that old building with narrow windows. You had very nice thick white oak doors. Very solid stuff. You had no group meetings and a faculty meeting once a year. You were left to yourself as you did your thing, and if your thing worked, that was great; if it didn't work, that wasn't so good. But there was no mentoring in my case because I crossed fields.

Initially Zenon did accounting in a particular way, which was a lot of economics in it. I didn't do accounting that way. I did accounting in the more traditional way. And I didn't really like it. I just took accounting to get a job. I knew I was going to leave because I didn't have to stay here because I knew, when I left Harvard, that I wouldn't like MIT. I didn't know anything about it, but I knew I wouldn't like it, because "publish or perish" and it was all quantitative and not interesting. But I had to finish my thesis.

I spent my whole first year at Sloan finishing my dissertation. I didn't really connect to Sloan very much because I was doing my dissertation. My thesis site was in Pittsburgh, so I was traveling a lot to be an on-site with my experiment. At that point Bill became dean. I think he came in September, when I came, but I was hired before he came. But Bill was very supportive, and I went out and did my dissertation and then came back and started teaching full time after I finished it.

B: You had done earlier work at Carnegie-Mellon, hadn't you?

M: Yes. And my interest in computers came from Carnegie-Mellon. It didn't come from Harvard. When I came to Harvard I was in the computer science department, joint with the business school, because the business school had no computers at all. Stan Buchin did some business game thing, but that was it. When I came here I began to get involved with business games too, because we had an embryonic interactive simulation business game combination exercise for the students, which was done for a few years.

But it was the Information Systems Group that became my home. So I was in information systems and management control and teaching information technology material... That was how it started.

B: Was there any sense for what was happening in other parts of the school? You had your niche.

M: The first three years I didn't have any sense at all, except for things like visiting Russians where I had to give a special seminar to the Russians or whomever on MIS and accounting. The dean's office asked me as there was no other part of the school that did that. The first time I became really aware of other people in a serious way was when Ed Schein and Mason Haire, Dan Holland, myself and a few others and Bill went down to Puerto Rico to meet with Governor Frere who was an MIT – I think engineer – but an MIT graduate in something. Not Sloan, but MIT. He wanted to involve a cross-disciplinary Sloan School group in some Puerto Rican issues, opportunities. So we went down to see what we could find that would lend itself to collective work. John Little might have been there, too. There was a group of five or six people plus the dean.

G: That would have been about 1969?

M: Yes. It might have been 1968, it might have been 1970, but

about that time. I might have been promoted to associate at that point so it would be 1969, probably. So that project didn't result in any particular joint collaborative work with me once we came back. . It might have involved others of those characters. But I got the impression that the whole thing didn't result in major program. And I don't remember going back to do anything there.

The next one was Boeing when Don Carroll got me involved with the information technology end of things. So, myself, Dave Ness, Wally Crowston from operations management, and some other younger faculty.

B: Who from operations research?

M: Wally Crowston. He went on to be dean at Toronto. His son eventually did his PhD at Sloan.

G: Kevin. I know Kevin. I was wondering whether that was the same name.

M: Yes. His father and I were very good friends. Wally and I were good friends, with Dave Ness and Tony Gorry. So the four of us all hung out together and did projects together. We went out to Boeing, then, to look at what would now be called 21st century manufacturing. But it wasn't, of course, in those days. It was operations research. Production line simulation and line balancing and linear programming and that sort of thing. We worked with their manufacturing strictly on the manufacturing end of things, as I recall. It was just information technology and manufacturing systems. So that was the next one. But that was not joint beyond the third floor of the Herman building in any major way, although Ed Schein may have been involved.

B: Right. But that again probably was because of alumni, in this case Steve Wilson, I would think. You mentioned the alumni connection to Puerto Rico. And Boeing used to send, regularly, to

the Sloan School.

M: Yes. Lots of alumni connections with Boeing. I was unconscious of them in the sense that we didn't go see Mr. X, or Don Carroll's student or some senior person. But there were certainly a lot of them, yes.

About that time, 1969, after about three years, I began teaching the senior executive program. That started when I had been here for two years, maybe three – I began teaching that program, which was then very small, 30 people. I taught accounting and a little bit of information technology. But they wanted to have somebody teaching accounting that could communicate it to managers, so I did that. I got involved in the senior program much earlier because of the dearth of accounting teachers in the school at that point. So I was the only choice. That's not quite true, but it was Tom Hill or me or Zenon.

B: That spoke well for your ability because they didn't put just any faculty member in front of the seniors. It was always an issue as to how one could hold …

M: Hold their attention. Yes. It's true that not everybody could teach seniors. Doesn't mean good or bad. It's just some people have that wavelength and some don't. In terms of school, nothing changed and things just went along in my particular writing and publishing world.

M: I went on sabbatical to Scotland for a year to write a book, my first book, which was out of my dissertation. So let's say that was 1973. I came back from that and then Bill asked me to go into the dean's office after I'd been teaching the senior executives for three years. I went into the dean's office to be what we then called the associate (now Deputy) dean for what's now what we call programs. So I didn't deal the faculty, the budget side. I had the PhD, Masters (of Science) and the new Accelerated Masters

programs.

In particular, they wanted to start a new one, the 12 month accelerated master's program. So I was there to get that started, as I recall. That was a new process of advertising, admission, and recruitment. The curriculum change was substantial, because you had to have the essence of the first year in a three month summer. That changed how we supported our faculty. The bookkeeping on how many courses you taught, what each person was doing, etc. This had been very informal, but we had to formalize loads to keep track. With a small faculty you knew everybody, knew what they were doing, and if the dean didn't like it he could say something. But as we added a new program, and as it got bigger he had to start to account for things more precisely. It was still pretty informal, so you taught three or four courses a year, but what a course was undefined. So it could be 10 students for a seminar, it could be 100 students, it didn't matter. So the AMP program just made it worse because then suddenly you had a cohort of students who had to be taught in an accelerated way over the summer. And then, you slot them into the rest of the courses. So there's a whole set of course curriculum design issues around that. Also the feeling that perhaps we were letting in inferior students because it was just one year. So there were a lot of conversations which fortunately never became particularly contentious. There were just lots of conversations. Some people would want this, some didn't. Some didn't want to teach, and some couldn't teach, and so forth. But all this was done with essentially no administrative support because we didn't expand administration at that point. We had Miriam Sherburne and Gertrude Burns and that was it. That's not quite true, but it's close to being true.

So the pressure on administration and then the classroom facilities were pathetic, really pathetic, embarrassingly so. It was like high school classrooms in the Herman Building. No tiered classrooms, no nothing. So you had to teach seniors in that sort of setting and the Masters students had paid good money to come to the MSc program and the AMP students had paid good money,

too. So you had to deal with that. A certain amount of my activities in the dean's office was to do with the fall out and remedies for that.

My claim to fame (!!) from my dean's office time, apart from the AMP program, was I did manage to get the architect, after fighting tooth and nail, to get a bridge built between the Sloan building (E52) and the building across the street. (E51).

B: We should name that the Michael Scott Morton Bridge.

M: No, just part of the job. To me, if you didn't have that, it was nuts to have anything meaningful across the street. You couldn't go out in the winter. So that was a successful move. But it was like pulling teeth because the planning office at MIT didn't care about Sloan because we were at the far end of the campus; we weren't right in the middle of it, or a priority.

That leads me to my next point. The biggest thing I remember about my time in the dean's office was the fact that we had a distant relationship with central. It varied from "Public Enemy #1" to "Well, maybe we can be friends, but I don't know," because they controlled the purse strings. So we couldn't touch our alumni for anything, certainly not money. So you couldn't get a bridge built with alumni money. You had to go through the central administration for everything. Even the AMP program, to get curriculum approval and other stuff required endless time.

As a Sloan faculty member I always felt like an outside at MIT that whole time in the dean's office. I didn't start to feel differently until after the next changes in central MIT administration.

It was a tense, slightly standoffish relationship. People in the Sloan School didn't want to get heavily involved with more undergraduates, we didn't want a feeling of being swamped, and also a feeling that we weren't able to contact our alumni, we

couldn't do things, because WE thought they were good. It was entirely in the dean's hands to persuade MIT central to permit it. If the dean had a good rapport with the then power structure of the center of MIT it was fine; if not, then not. Some people in the center of MIT were very hard to have a good rapport with. There was some distinct coolness toward what the Sloan School was about, to do with things like salary and how much you can pay and how much total income you can have. I didn't pay much attention to that, but they were definitely there in the ethos. So that made it difficult.

And I saw it simply because the AMP program was … I remember going to meetings about that, to get it approved, various committees, which was a slow painful process... But the other thing that was true was Gertrude Burns, Miriam Sherburne, and Eleanor Chin ran the place operationally. Gertrude Burns was the financial person and Miriam Sherburne was admissions, and Eleanor the Sloan Fellows. Recruitment, program management; they did everything. And they were fantastic. Bright, able, loyal, hard working. And we liked them. When I was in the dean's office, I never remember any trouble with students. But it became impossible because we began to expand the programs. The goal with AMP was to raise more revenue and use facilities more effectively, which is fine if you have the support structure that goes with it. We essentially added students and programs before we added support structure, which is fair enough. But we were slow to add support structure behind them, particularly physical infrastructure.

Then you had a gradual feeling of unfairness among the faculty members about who was teaching how many, how often, when. And some particularly – let's call them bloody minded – but some particularly strong individuals who declared that what they were doing with their seminar was at least a full course, if not more. The fact that they had five people and met once a week for an hour didn't seem to bother them. That's not exactly a precise example, but that sort of thing. So there began to be some

difficulty with class scheduling because of that sort of stuff. These are random 'jottings' but they give you a flavor of the times.

B: We had a curriculum with many more required courses, too. That was the way individual groups probably fought to maintain their size was to ensure that their course stayed on a required basis.

M: Right. So the whole first year was required. No discussion with that. That was fixed, for sure. There was no discussion for the first, I don't know how many years, of that ever changing. The second year had electives, but there was only one degree. So you couldn't do minors in something. You just had electives to finish out your year. I guess you could say you 'minored', but it was not a big deal.

And we didn't do course evaluations. They did one, (starting in 1971?) informally, in the dean's office, at the end of the year—who was your best teacher? They started that after they had the Teaching Award (The Salgo Noran award), they had to do something. Bill arranged with wealthy donor to have the award funded for Sloan, then they had to start asking opinions from students. That began a whole new approach to the role of students in the life and actions of the School.

There was no obvious internationalization moment at the School. Internationalization was always good, but not a major 'Program', it just happened by chance and particular Alumna or Faculty member.. One of the earliest ones I was involved with was India because Tom Hill had been out there the year before me. The Ford Foundation gave a big grant of money to Sloan to support the IIMs in India.

B: The Indian Institutes of Management.

M: We had Calcutta, and Harvard had Ahmedabad. I went out in my second or third year.

B: When you were a deputy dean?

M: No, before.

B: So it was in the late 1960s, then?

M: Yes. I've forgotten when it was, exactly, let's say it was 1969. I went out to India for four months, part of a term and the summer, with Mary and one child. I think Glen Urban went out after me. Dave Montgomery and I went together.

B: Charlie Myers went at some point, too.

M: He went earlier, I think.. So we went there and we were involved in building up research capacity at IIM Calcutta. That was before I went to the dean's office. It must have been after Puerto Rico. So, India and Puerto Rico were the two foreign things, apart from visiting Russians, before Russia opened up. Nothing in China at all at this point.

And then the Accelerated Master's Program and the dean's office. Dean's office and faculty meetings were less structured. There was never a vote. You never voted. It was a sense of the meeting. No voting at faculty meetings by tradition. So tenure decisions were advice to deans, and he got a sense of who spoke and whose body language was suggestive, and then he left without asking for a vote, and could then say what he wanted to say at the center of MIT given what would be appropriate there, which was fine. It worked quite well, although it left some lack of clarity as to what was happening.

It was a nice for a small school, because it still was very small. We had 200 MS students total. The year I came it was a 100 entering a year. Then it moved to 200 students entering, plus the 30 from the AMP and 50 Sloan Fellows.

G: When you mentioned first coming here, you said you weren't going to stay at MIT.

M: No.

G: When did that change, and what changed that?

M: It didn't change in any direct way, I suppose. It changed because I had a three- year contract. I knew I wouldn't like teaching accounting. I finished my dissertation at the end of the first year, and I still had two years to go. So I stayed on. I had planned to leave right away and go back to Scotland. But I stayed on to finish out my contract, and before the contract finished I was renewed. So I had five years, not two. I was still going to get involved in things and ideas around me, so I did, and then I got promoted. So at that point I thought as it was quite an interesting place I would keep going with my research (in DSS) and stay. I'd met lots of people at that point. Dan Holland and 2 or 3 economists, can't think of their names, econometrician, joint Econ dept./Sloan [*transcription addition: possibly Paul Cootner??*], but they were interested in my work as well. So was Ed Schein.

M: They were all influential in my deciding to keep going. I suspect they were influential in the fact I got tenure, too, because they mostly came from the hard, right-wing analytical extreme! Yet were prepared to say that they thought it was important that I stayed.
        One feature that took place in those times, which was very important—and I've said this to the current dean, but we can't do it because we're bigger—Bill used to invite to his house for dinner a cross- section of the demographics of the faculty. So, assistant, associate, full; male, female, and everything else; cross section, different department, different specialties. I think he did one a month, or maybe he did more than one a month. But I certainly went to several. And at those dinners, early the first year I was at

MIT, I met Dan Holland, and those economists whose names I can't remember, and John Little. Also people outside my department were there for dinner with their wives. They were always interesting dinner parties. Sometimes you didn't see those people again, and sometimes you did, but you usually knew them. You could say "Hello" in the faculty club. And sometimes you began not only to say "Hello" in the faculty club, you might have dinner or lunch there. At Bill Pounds' dinners for a faculty of 50 or whatever we were in those days you got to know everybody. So if you couldn't make friends with or have a good acquaintanceship with professional friends, with people, it was your fault. It probably meant you didn't have anything interesting to say!

G: It's interesting. I think you point this out, and maybe it's just forgotten, but I remember when I came here as a PhD student, there were still lunches up at the faculty club and the round tables. But combine that with the dinners where you actually met somebody, then you would be much more comfortable sitting with them at that big round table and talking. And there was a venue for that. Did anything that influenced your teaching or research come out of those conversations?

M: They did. I have to rewind the clock to figure out which particular projects came out. But certainly some joint PhD courses, and being on dissertations committees with people. I can't remember at this point a specific instance, but it certainly made a difference in terms of the way you felt about the place and whether you wanted to stay or not because you began to realize all these big names, like Eli Shapiro, who were so well-known and awe-inspiring, were actually approachable, and actually were nice. You could engage in a conversation of content with them and not feel like you were out of it. So that was why I stayed basically, because I became comfortable.

B: You were mentioning international, like Puerto Rico and India,

as another way faculty across different areas would connect.

M: And Boeing.

B: You had a major role in establishing CISR, didn't you?

M: Yes.

B: That whole development of research centers as a way to bring people together around a common interest. When did that happen?

M: That started almost right away. That was because my dissertation involved the information technology stuff and the interactive technologies. I hooked up with some people at EE (Bill Martin) and some behavioral people such as Ed Schein. So several people raised questions I had not thought about. Then as a result of some articles I'd written, alumni began to call or come by with questions or comments. Before long, it was clear there was lots of interest among companies as well as faculty in some of the I.T. issues. Bill knew about that either because he always knew about things, or because I told him. He was the one who pushed me into: "Why don't you start a research consortium, or collection of people interested in this area, in things in the systems area. I thought, "Why not?" But I didn't think of it, as I recall. He thought of it and said, "Michael, why don't you?" We'd been talking about – perhaps at one of these dinners, or else some of the alumni that he knew would just talk to me. It emerged from conversations early on. It was in its primitive form. We said there could be only ten, or a small number to begin with. But it grew very rapidly as the word spread, so raising money was never a problem.

And it grew because Jack Rockart got involved very early. Jack had a much more tolerant and listening attitude toward information technology people than I did. So he was a natural front man for that role, and did a super job. I tried to manage/do/shepherd some of the research behind that. But he was

much better at empathizing and understanding what they were saying about their issues, all of which didn't, on the surface of it, interest me at all because they were not to do with technology and research and new tools – that was my interest at the time. They were more to do with large-scale data processing questions. I was interested in the decision making, interactive, front-end challenges. That was the difference. Jack could empathize because he'd been an IBM salesman. He had worked with big mainframe computers and knew that world. His wife and my wife knew each other from those IBM days, before I came to MIT. CISR is still going. That's been a very successful operation. Entirely through Jack and people Jack hired and the research that CISR undertook and published. He was very good with that.

B: Did that bring people together, particularly faculty and PhD students?

M: Faculty and PhD students big time, because we were able to support PhD students. The faculty were mostly in the information technology area, there was nobody else the first couple of years. Then we began to get some interest on the behavioral side, and a bit of interest on the operational research side because of our friendships with the Crowston-Ness crowd. Dave Ness was an IT person who was friendly with Wally Crowston. They had some ideas about games and simulation and things, which a couple of people in CISR were intrigued with early on and we were given a lot money for that. But basically it was data processing and what makes it work or not work. Technology driven questions back in those days. It changed over time but at the beginning the technology was magic.

B: We've taken you through your stint as deputy dean. As I remember that ended in the early 1980s. It was probably mainly during the late 1970s that you were in the dean's office, because when I got here in 1980 I think you were finishing your stint as

deputy dean. And within a year the deanship had passed from Bill Pounds to Abe Siegel in the early 1980s.

M: I left with the change of dean, as is appropriate. I resigned and took a leave of absence.

B: Tell us about the project of the 1990s because that was a big project. We've been talking here about ways people relate across the school. How did that come about? You should give us some of the parameters of that because that was a big deal.

M: Right. It was. From my perspective, because of the changes that were going on with technology, and the fact that I'd become convinced there were some issues, right or wrong, that we were not looking at that I could see would benefit from field research. Since Information Technology (communications AND computers) raised new questions of organizations and people. The idea where they worked, how they worked, when they worked, who they worked with, could all change as a result of communications and computer technologies. That was something worthy of exploration. I had Bob Horton (from B.P. and somebody else at AMEX who were both very aware of those kinds of changes. They said, "Why don't you do some research around it?"

We began to talk, and we decided that the way to do it was a consortium of public and private organizations. But it was clear that problems were not technology problems. I'd grown up enough by that time to know that it had to involve other kinds of people. So the question was, which kinds? There were obviously labor issues, there were behavioral issues, there was power—all that. I didn't worry about marketing particularly – but we did support some marketing, partly because Marketing here had always been very special, and very good at what it did. But what it did wasn't part of this particular mix, as I thought it was going to take shape.

We put out an RFP and said these are the kinds of issues

that we're interested in doing. The first thing was convene the sponsor group, sponsor representatives. I had a two-day, away day discussing issues. We had a bunch of faculty. I invited Stu Myers and other people to listen to what the people were saying, and vice versa. Jack Rockart was heavily involved as well. From that we ended up with some themes and processes evolved.

But the thing that was difficult was it was the first time I'm aware of that we'd had a school project where the sponsors were actively interested in participating. Their deal was you have early access to see what's happening. But we the faculty have got to publish our findings. You can't stop publishing, but you get to come to quarterly – it should have been six monthly, but I said quarterly, mistakenly – quarterly meetings to view progress and hear us, and we'll listen to your feedback. That was the first time we'd ever done that, I think. So the sponsors got a head start on what would eventually become public knowledge.

So there were these were two-day sessions, which were agony to set up and get on everybody's calendar and make sure everybody was there and all that. At their best, they worked very well. But they should have been six months apart, not three months apart. That happened when Tom Malone and Wanda Orlikowski and people who were new to the school hadn't been in a situation like that before. They hadn't been used to listening to sponsors, and they found that different, I think useful, in the case of Tom, anyway. Zenon was involved. John Little was involved, quite heavily and Stu Myers. So stalwarts were Little, Myers and Tom Allen…

B: So you had a nice cross section?

M: Yes. Good cross section. And Schein and Lotte Bailyn were involved, as well. Schein, Little, Myers, there were more, but those are the ones I remember as being particularly useful and important to be at the meetings. And younger faculty were there, Tom Malone, and people like that, all young guys, at that point.

B: And this project went over how many years?

M: 1990, so it was going to be five years, $100,000 each year, so half a million dollars each. $100,000 each for five years. So a five-year program for ten companies, $5,000,000.

B: It was somewhere in the 1990s that it was happening.

M: Exactly right. Let's say 1994, or thereabouts. I was designed to be a 1990s, how are things going to be different in this way? Al Silk was involved, dean's office, closing a couple of the final sponsors who when top management changes, they change. So they were in limbo for a while, and Silk came and closed.

B: Going forward, we could go to another big project which you had for the 21st Century?

M: Yes. That followed directly on.

21St Century was basically Tom Allen and myself. Tom agreed to be research director, if I was going to work on the project myself, and be the front man. He would work with my colleagues, and he was very interested in research methodology and the quality of published papers.

B: I want to ask a couple of questions about these consortia. How would you characterize some of the challenges? You've been at the center of some of these new developments within the school, these consortia that bring people together across different parts of the school at the same time that you're working with sponsors (this is almost needs a research paper in its own right) about the challenges, the gains, and the issues in running these consortia.

M: In a way, I suppose it's similar to the fact that only certain people can teach well, only certain people can teach the seniors, only certain faculty members are willing to engage in discussion

about research projects. Some of them are so clear on what they want to do, that's what they're going to do. Never mind what the world cares about or whether anybody's interested in what they're doing. They don't care. They'll talk, but they don't want to get engaged with you because in fact they know what they're going to do. Either they have enough funding, or they have lots of money from somewhere, so they just don't want to talk. Even though I might have thought that they would have a good contribution to make, they don't care. So that was the part that always surprised me – and it's quite natural. Some people have an agenda that's so clear they don't want to be interrupted, at least not at this point. So that was a surprise to me in both the 1990s and in the 21st Century. Both projects were a surprise that way because there were more people like that than I thought there were. That's one aspect of reality.

The second is that it takes a certain kind of person – like Jack Rockart – and almost a full-time job to maintain the flow of information, the right level of discussion, both ways, as I imagine you know. Some sponsors want to know some things, want some output. We can't give them output, but we can give them something. That whole discussion was more laborious and more labyrinthine than I thought it would be. They don't speak our language and we don't speak their language, easily, and so therefore it take real time and effort to make it work. Some people can do it, but you would teach them slowly. That was much more arduous than I ever thought it would be. So I spent many a sleepless night, "How do I address this issue they're raising?" because I understand where they're coming from, but we can't do that. It's not what we're about. Or similarly, some faculty member has a super idea. Intellectually, I can see that but the sponsor had trouble.

We didn't have enough muscle and financial backing behind us to say, "This is what we do," and listen for a while and say, "We don't like it. I'm sorry, but we don't do that." And I

never thought I was in a position to make that dogmatic assertion to them unless under extreme duress. Because we didn't have enough money, ever. Or I didn't want to louse things up or allow things to cascade out of control. So I'd keep talking and try to get them to the point where they could see. And that took a long time lots of times. That was real effort. It got in the way of lots of other things.

Then there's an entirely minor point, but when we came to the books for the 1990s program. I should have, in hindsight, spent much more time on careful editing of everybody's work, my own included, in those books, because in fact that never happened because I had the mistaken impression that (a) all people who wrote an article would do that themselves, which isn't true; of me at least, . And (b), I thought editors in Oxford Press would do that. Not true. They do their duty well. They don't do the kind of careful editing that even I could have done if I had sat down and said, "Michael, you're going to do it. Just go through each chapter, each page, carefully, and think about it from the reader's point of view." As a result, the books were half of what they could have been – well, not half – but they're a lot less than they could have been because they're not as readable as they should be. And they could have been made that way. You can hire a good, full-time editor. It would be worth the money to do that. But I didn't. I didn't think of it. I didn't do it. It's all right. They've sold. They've sold well.

B: Do you want to stay on this? I want to shift to another kind. We're talking here about research centers. And earlier, before we got on tape, we were talking about the role you're playing with Cambridge. This is another whole development within the school, these educational alliances between Sloan and Chinese universities. And you were saying earlier, we've got something going on in Brazil, Portugal, and Russia. So the question is, what do we say? It's been a major

development in the last 10 or 15 years at the Sloan School, these educational alliances. And drawing on your experience with the Cambridge Alliance.

M: I can speak to that from two points of view. One point of view is the educational alliances, which are usually beneficial, but fearfully expensive. Expensive in the sense that the faculty member from Sloan really gets involved; you don't just go there. You've got to mentally go there and spend physical time and mental time. That's hugely interesting, but disruptive of whatever you did before. So a lot of stuff gets left behind because you can't do it all. You can't do everything you did before plus all the stuff you're about to do there. I always, and people I watch, underestimate how much effort it would take. Just go in there to teach for two weeks, or just go in there for a month or a term. And it turned out to be multiples of that time in terms of attention time, attention span, physical time, too, and emotional time. It's a different culture. So that was one piece which was very different.

The second piece that's very different is for the School. I don't think the School's recognized how much it's going to cost to do that and how many they can actually do, and the reputational risks of not doing it properly. That's a big factor. I would not do it because I'd be very conscious of what it was going to take. If you look at the ratio of support staff and the required support staff to make this thing work and the revenue we would get from it, what looks like it's profitable to us right now is not as profitable as people think. I wouldn't be surprised if at the end the net (as Bill Pounds always said) it's a wash. We don't make money from it. We think we do. We don't make money when you count ALL the costs. Switching from that topic to the other piece of my second point here is I think the faculty were on a different route—two different routes—at the same time. Multiple expansions internationally and multiple expansions of education. There were also new programs, so there's three. Executive education is now a

huge business that takes masses of support staff to make sure it works properly, and draws down the faculty to do that. They like it because they get more money, which is not talked about very much, but it is a fact, it is known. How much more money and how much it distracts them from doing other things is not yet clear, I don't think. I don't know this for a fact. I just get the impression.

So those two things are happening at the same time. Given what I saw stretching from back in 1966 and just going to India and going to the AMP program and doing those things, we were a fraction of the size we are now. But then, we stretched ourselves too much with a faculty of 50 – or whatever the numbers were, they were equivalent in relative terms to what they are now. But today it's an analogous situation. Today we have expanded executive education and we've expanded the number of degree programs. So we have at least ten degree programs right now, and those all take time. The few people I know whom I've stayed in close touch with are being pulled in 16 different ways. So this person is the head of a new master's program. School started one of their 17 new masters programs. He's very heavily engaged in research, very heavily engaged in teaching, lightly engaged in executive education. They want him to do more but he doesn't want to do it. He's got enough fortitude to say, "I'm not going to do it." Other people I know who've said, "Ah, well, if I'm going to teach executive education and get paid versus go to China to teach in a course there and not get paid…" Well, they stay here.

The incentives are mixed. So we've got mixed incentives with unknown consequences for different individuals, depending on what they're doing that year, and this whole jigsaw puzzle is moving.

Then we have tenure committees that are making decisions about tenure around grounds that haven't changed much since the days we all remember. I haven't been going for the last two years, but my impression is, talking to people, it's a more complicated mix.

G: You say in the 1960s you saw signs of people being stretched, and you see some of those signs today. Are they similar signs? Have they changed? What do you see as the symptoms of that?

M: The percentage of faculty who can do any given thing is roughly the same I suspect. There are the ones who can teach executive education, there are ones who can teach abroad, the ones who can do a great job in the classroom, the ones who can do great job on research. Those proportions are still fractured. When I talk to people in one of the fractures and say, "What are you doing these days?" then they retreat to what they do well. "I don't want to know what's going on outside my favorite activity because I'm so busy doing what I'm doing, I'm being taken away from it." So that's part of what I mean by "fracture."

I don't have good data for this, just very anecdotal stuff because for the last two years I've not been here much. So I've been in the office a couple days a week for a few hours, but not like I used to be, all the time. And, of course, the new buildings made it difficult to see people because we're spread out so much now – which is great – but we're still not what we did before. Before we get to see more people. Each floor is...

B: Oh, yeah. The L-shaped arrangement.

M: It's actually quite hard to see people now. I tried to pick an office that was central, nearest to the people I cared about. But there are other people I care about, too, but they're miles away. I haven't been down to see Fiona Murray and Scott Stern, who are on my floor, who are in my group, are not that far away, but it's 100 yards down the corridor, around the corner, no line of sight.

B: It violates Tom Allen's research.

M: Yes. Right. Exactly. So I don't see them. It complicates the whole communication thing. The good news is we're in a new

building. The bad news is we're in a new building. And so this fracturing, is to be expected.

B: To be faithful to your career, we should understand the transition. You moved into strategy and different teaching areas from where you started with accounting and MIS and so on. How did that come about?

M: It's just a fact of life. If I could rewind the whole thing, replay my life again, I'd probably do exactly the same thing. But if I wanted to become famous I would have stayed in information technology. If I had wanted to be an "icon" in the information technology world, I would have had to stay in information technology. But what happened was I got involved with boards, because I was voted on to a board very early on, 1977, of a manufacturing company, a *Fortune 200* company at that point.

B: Through alumni?

M: Through complete blind chance. I belong to a small 'dining' group. And one member of the group was a board member of this company. I was in the dining club because of a next-door neighbor who was chief librarian at Harvard, Doug Bryant. My next-door neighbor in Lexington. He said, "Michael, why don't you come to this dining club?" I went to the dining club, met this guy – two people, actually – and ended up on two boards.

Then, having gotten on the board, you realize that information technology was not the beginning and end of the world. I'd probably come to that conclusion at some point, too, but it certainly happened then. I knew I never wanted to go to accounting. Accounting was purely a way of getting into the School. It was the only job available.

B: But MIS would be different.

M: Quite. MIS would have been where I would have stayed. I would have stayed there longer but for this connection to the boards. Then I got more into real strategic questions about the future of the company, so I started teaching strategy because it was clear from what I saw in the boards, they had no real clue what that was. I didn't have a clue, either, but I knew there must be something more than I had. So I began to read and get involved, and I began to teach.

Things like the 1990s were driven by that. Because my interests were more about what information technology enables and more organizational execution. So it happened that way. So it was just sheer chance, and it looked interesting to me, so I tried it.

I also think that I – this is a failing on my part – I get intrigued by new things. I don't like to stay with the old, even though the old has infinite possibilities if one just stuck with it. So that's how it happened, sort of chance, but a chance that looked interesting and intriguing, so why not check it out? There have been other chances I could have taken and not done.

B: When did it occur? Do you remember when you first started teaching strategy? We're just trying to understand how a place like this allows a person to evolve.

M: I spoke too narrowly for a second. When I left the dean's office I was going to go on sabbatical. I was going to go to INSEAD.

B: And that was in the early 1980s?

M: Early 1980s. I was going to go to IMD. This is early 1980s. And at that point, a person who had left BCG (Walker Lewis)– a Harvard graduate, not a Sloan graduate, but he'd taken courses at Sloan – had started a company, a spin-off from BCG called SPA. He was CEO, and they were doing extremely well. It was a very small consultancy, 20-30 consultants. He said, "Michael, don't go to IMD. Come to us for a year and help shape our intellectual

content. And here's the number we'll pay you." I said, "Fine." So I
went down Washington, D.C., and they rented a house for me in
Georgetown. Our two kids went to school there and I spent a year
at SPA. It was absolutely fascinating because that was an exposure
from the consultant's point of view. I came back from that and
began to teach strategy.

B: That's what a sabbatical is supposed to do, right?

M: Yes. Actually, I missed three sabbaticals my whole time here. I
didn't take them.

B: I'm getting toward my last questions, and George, you come in
here. The question that the dean is asking – and we'll be convening
focus groups – is, what's distinctive over the journey of the Sloan
School? What are the themes? What are the big "ah-has" for the
Sloan School? If we want to tout what we're good at, what we
should be known for? You were deputy dean, and you've been a
senior faculty member. When you talk to your friends outside of
the School, what do they say about the Sloan School? Or what do
you say to them about the Sloan School that's distinctive?

M: One thing for sure is that Sloan School, rightly or wrongly,
adheres very strongly to academic rigor, as opposed to business
improvement – not "as opposed to," but you can do both. But some
say that case-based schools are concerned with current practice and
trying to get better. We're concerned with the future and what's
coming at us and getting ready for it, on the one hand.

      Second, you deal with better by rigor and truth, not by
anecdote and happenstance. It sounds like I'm being extreme, but it
really was those two things. I think it's been very clear – because
the Sloan School is part of MIT, and MIT is largely science and
engineering, and science and engineering largely deal with truths
and physical facts and bridges break or they don't break or
molecules exist or they don't exist. That sort of science dimension

influences people's perception of the Sloan School and the reality of the Sloan School.

So we have people that go to extremes to maintain the purity of the academic rigor of the Sloan School, which goes too far sometimes. But knowing that it is a fact of life distinguishes the Sloan School.

The second thing that distinguishes the Sloan School is the extent to which we're concerned with the future and what's coming up – Management in the 1990s or Organizations of the 21st century – that are trying to look ahead give our clientele or other population a sense of what's coming, definitely get better prepared for it.

So those would be the two things I think are different.

A third thing is just that we are small and innovative. So you know all your classmates in your program, or all your colleagues in the faculty – perhaps not all, but more so than bigger places. That argument is less true now that we're in this new building and now that we're bigger. But it used to be, in my case. I would say that I know all the faculty. I know most of the students. Because I'm teaching the Sloan strategy core course I get half the students in the class and see the other half.

The next thing that is obvious is, you have good and bad news. The good news is you can do your own thing. You can try experiments and nobody bothers you. If you want to teach a new course it's very easy to get a new course up and running. There's no huge committees to go through. Now, there is if you want to make it a permanent part of whatever, but if you want to try something you can try it. That's always been true for me, and I've started several new classes. I could never do that from where my friends up the river are, that doesn't work that way. You can't. With a big school you can't do that. But we were a small enough school you could do that. In the old days it was very easy. It's harder now, but it's still easy to do. So that's flexibility and nimbleness because we were smaller.

An example of that is these new Sloan programs. Adding new

kinds of educational options.

B: What about big ideas?

M: Big ideas, always, probably, but always, here, have to come from the bottom up.

B: Yeah, but are there some examples over the last 40, 50 years? The dean's going to put together a series of documents. Some of it may be up on the Web, but some of it may be in print. He'd like to know what some of the themes are that are distinctive.

M: In the spirit of Doug McGregor, Theory X, Theory Y kind of thing – and Jay Forrester's ideas of course – these are before my era. There was a time when the literature and our business school press and once *Time Magazine*, where decision support system and that whole notion of interactive computers can help people. Eric Brynjolfsson's most recent thing is the modern-day equivalent of that stuff then. What I was saying then is equivalent to what Eric's saying today. It's not exactly the same at all. It is analogous. So there has always been some information technology-related things have come out like that. Eric von Hippel's "Listen to the Customers," there have been a series of things on that side which have resonated in the business world.

We soon forget where they came from and so we're not associated in the same way in the public at large mind, but they all form a part of what makes Sloan School and MIT distinctive. So, we are constantly rated number one in information technology, and we really shouldn't be in the strict sense of number of publications, number of students sense. It's because it's all of the people. The history of Don Carroll, me and Jack and Stu Madnick Then Tom, Wanda and Eric , over time, coupled with MIT. I think if all of us had been somewhere else we might not have been great at the time. The school would not be rated as highly because we'd be swamped by the rest of the school, whereas here, we're amplified by the rest

of the school, the school being MIT. That may not be true. It's my impression.

G: It does raise a question I wanted to follow up on. In this time that you've been here, the Sloan School has become much more preeminent than it was. There was a time when it was rated 10, 12, 14, and I think people were satisfied with that. And now it's 3 or 4, and one year it was top rated. Your thoughts about: is it the system or have things here at MIT changed? What enabled that?

M: As you might imagine, all of the above, in the sense that the world's changed and the world is much more aware of the fact that technology plays an important role. We have become much better at announcing ourselves, which helps. And we have many more things, particularly in the finance domain. There are lots of things in finance that come out of here that are not mentioned in my little list of big ideas. I don't work with them, most of them, so I don't think of them. Bigger size, more active marketing, marketing visibility. More publications that go into the popular domain, and the fact that it's not Sloan, now. It's always MIT Sloan.

G: I know if you look at MIT's history, you really see where MIT became preeminent. In some ways you could say maybe it was how they approached education in the 1860s, early 1900s, which was very different, to actually go out in the field and do their work, rather than just in a classroom. But it really was engineering science. And what happened after WWII, which was accelerated by Vannevar Bush going off and starting the National Science Foundation and actually providing resources to promote that.

        Is there anything like that kind of moment for MIT Sloan? I think, certainly, placement of our graduates, the importance of quantitative analysis, and MIT having that reputation, not just in associated with MIT, but people who come here have to have calculus. And it scares some people away. So you have people that

are more quantitative, and the world has been more analytical.

M: I think that whole set of strengths we have and continue to keep are a fact of life and the more we value those things more then we benefit. I've always said that MIT is rigorous and focused on the future. To the extent that future involves people getting much more aware of I-Pads, I-Pods, and whatever, they now are aware of technology, and it is changing the future, so they're more accepting of things that come out of a place that deals with the future. So we keep pushing on the fact that we deal with the future and we're technology competent. That can only help.

G: I sometimes think of science fiction as fantasy or advanced product development.

M: That's right. And it's that sort of spirit.

G: Do we have time for two more questions?

B: Yes. I was going to ask Michael what we haven't covered that you would have if you were thinking about getting ready for this interview? So both.

G: One of mine is a curiosity. I don't know the answer to this but I want to explore it. What is the difference between a management school and a business school? And the transition I've heard people speak about, that we're now a business school, and we used to be a management school. I don't know exactly what that means, but I'd be curious on your views on that.

M: It's a very important point, and one that I was going to raise. Management means managing any kind of organization. Business school means businesses, for-profit operations. And to the extent that that the world is getting involved with more and more large, national service, or Medicare, large organizations, mammoth

organizations – Post Office – that are badly managed, or not managed, we have a role to play in that, as a management school. A business school could too, but the label doesn't help them, whereas a management school does help them.

I'm conscious of the fact that there might be other things. Michael Cusumano just sent me a little piece he did: an op-ed piece for IEEE about the Post Office, and what they could do to make profit, to make themselves profitable. Very interesting piece. Very short, page and a half, but super ideas, which, of course, the Post Office hasn't even thought about – well, I don't know if they've thought about it or not. Nobody's made the Post Office think about them.

More and more of those kinds of things as governments get bigger is an untapped area. We've not talked about it because it's not sexy to talk about it, and the schools don't at this point. When I first came, we were very big into that, and I think there's an opportunity there. It's not a very sexy opportunity, and it's not a very financially rewarding opportunity, unfortunately. But, it's a very worthwhile opportunity, and played right it could get foundation support in the best of times. There are foundations big enough to have to make it do with an Alfred P. Sloan, again.

The Sloan Foundation, when they started the school, made a big bet. Gates or somebody could make a big bet on how to improve that part of our life and just move us away from the … That would cause disruption of all kinds. I'm not sure we should do it. If you'd asked me that question I'd have said I don't know the answer to that one, but I think it's a good question. I don't know what to do.

B: No. It has been a big change. Hardly anybody does the MS anymore. Interest in the thesis and what you and Arnoldo and other people had – what was the term where you had people around an orchestrated topic? There was a term for that kind of thesis where people would work together….

M: Structured thesis.

B: That's been lost. It doesn't happen anymore.

M: That's a pity because that was a useful thing for everybody concerned.

B: You had another question, George?

G: Just a minor one, so I'll save it for the very end.

M: The only thing we've lost that we didn't talk about was the one I just raised. We used to have a dimension of our life which was that not-for-profit sector, which nobody anywhere in the world seems to be working on. So we would be distinct if we did that. Or, if they are, they're so small we don't see them.

B: Or it's coming from the Kennedy School, or schools of education, public policy places.

M: It's certainly coming from there. But those don't have the same clout or visibility as do "business schools."

G: CISR. I want to go all the way back. It may have been one of the first research centers ever at a university. From my reading I think it is because I had done a little bit of looking back, and for some of our alliances that is where these ideas came from. I'm curious, do you go back to that time, the ideas for how to organized, how to structure? Do you remember learning from anybody else, looking anywhere else, or just making it up? What's the genesis? You mentioned Bill encouraging you to go off and do that, and Jack being there to help.

M: You can ask Jack the same question but Jack and I just did it. We didn't look anywhere. That was partly our own hubris or partly

our own lack of thought. I don't know. We didn't see the issue, we just didn't see it being a particular big problem. We just started and see where it went. So, if we'd been told "this is a make or break, get it right," then we'd have looked. But we didn't really know how it would go, so we thought we'd try. We didn't look, I'm afraid. I don't know why.

G: Those may be the best ways. I remember being shocked when John Henry came here and did a talk. He's the principal owner of the Red Sox. He made his money in the futures market. He started out as a rock musician in California but had to go back and manage his family farm in Iowa because of some unfortunate things in his family. While he was there, he realized that prices kept going up and down on what he was selling, and thought, "Is there a better way to handle this?" As he said, if he had come to a place like MIT and had been told, "No, you can't outbid the futures market; that's not a place you can make money," he never would have tried. But because he didn't know, he tried. And he was very successful in that.

M: It worked. Sometimes not knowing helps.

B: This has been a very significant conversation. Your role here, and the different things that we've explored, gives us quite a few different windows for looking in at this amoeba that we call the Sloan School.

G: What I will say is, what was most interesting to me in this interview was your original saying that you were very isolated when you came here and were over in the Herman Building. And yet, what I hear is a life of being connected, and those connections driving what happened. What felt like isolation – and I wondered how much of that was you just trying to get your dissertation done, because I've been there; all of us have—maybe that put you in a certain box. But what I hear is a lot of richness over the years that

you have both contributed to but also enabled as well.

M: The thing that ultimately appealed to me most with MIT – going back to that question – was that you were free to do your own thing. Nobody told me I had to go to this meeting, or I had to do that. My first five years here nobody said anything to me. I just did what seemed interesting and good and fun, and did it. And that was fine. And it worked for me. But for some people it wouldn't work. Lots of my colleagues who aren't here anymore, it didn't work for them. But if I had been told what to do, or if I had been in this group and there were very clear boundaries of, you can talk to MIS group, Michael, but that's it, then I would not have blossomed. I would have left, actually.

G: Just from my own experience as a PhD student, you feel that. You come here. You got to take your courses. But after that you've got to find people and do your own thing. In some ways it forces you to chart a course, and there are good sides and bad sides to that.

M: Yes, that's true. It's good for some people and lousy for others. I think the idea of trying to capture these things is terrific. Not for me, but for the school to have some kind of record.