

Proceedings of the Second European Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work
Bannon, L., Robinson, M. & Schmidt, K. (Editors)
September 25-27, 1991, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Organizational Memory

E. Jeffrey Conklin
Corporate Memory Systems, Inc., USA

Susan Leigh Star
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Univeristy of Keele, UK

Panelists:

Liam Bannon, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands
John Bowers, University of Manchester, UK
E. Jeffrey Conklin, Corporate Memory Systems, Austin, Texas, USA
George Por, Organizational Learning Systems, Berkeley, California, USA
Susan Leigh Star, University of Keele, UK

This panel session brings together a diverse group of people to explore the concept of organizational memory. Closely related to organizational learning, organizational memory is the property of organizations that provides continuity and learning. Organizational memory is not just the aggregate of the memories of the organization's members -- it is a social phenomenon.

The panel session explores the phenomenon of organizational memory from the following perspectives:

1) Technology. How can CSCW augment organizational memory? CSCW applications currently focus on augmenting the process, i.e. communication and coordination. Do these alone provide the basis for organizational memory? What else is needed to make the memory effective? Organizational memory is

currently weak on remembering rationale -- the reasoning behind the artifacts and events. Can CSCW help capture this "why" information?

2) Social science. "Scaling up" our understanding of cognitive processes from individual to organizational involves conceptualizing problems of communication and interpretation of representations, as well as understanding the nature of joint work at creating those representations. What happens, for example, when a representation is created by one person and used by another? Or passed a long distance between many sites? Also, representing group and distributed cognition processes often deletes the work of making and maintaining representations, or fails to pick up informal or devalued work processes associated with them. Can we "restore the work" in discussing organizational cognition? Finally, what is the status of "cognitivism" -- the application of cognitive models to organizations.

3) Management. Why is organizational memory a buzzword in management circles now? In particular, what is the relationship of organizational memory to the "learning organization" (e.g. as described in Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*)?