



BOOKS@WORK

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Dear Partners, Participants, Professors, Supporters and Friends:

Chester Barnard's 1938 book *The Functions of the Executive* set out one of the first theories of organization. Still in print, the book won the Academy of Management's recognition as the second most influential management book of the 20th century (following only Frederick Taylor's legendary *Principles of Scientific Management*). So much has changed in the field of management (and in the world!) that one might easily dismiss Barnard's theories. Grounded in human cooperation, however, they remain surprisingly relevant eighty years later.

In describing the essence of organization, Barnard wrote: "Formal organization is that kind of cooperation among men that is conscious, deliberate, purposeful." But, Barnard explains, "cooperation has no reason for being except as it can do what the individuals cannot do." In short, the essence of Barnard's organization reminds us that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Books@Work is about nurturing the interrelationship of those parts. As Barnard knew so long ago, and we know viscerally today, the whole suffers if the parts – and the connections between them – are not strong. It's that simple. Participants (and especially senior leaders) tell us consistently that Books@Work helps develop these connections. Today we describe them with words like "high-quality connections" or "an environment of psychological safety" or a "culture of true inclusion." No matter how you say it, these are the hallmarks of a cooperative – and effective – organization.

2017 was a banner year for Books@Work. We grew in breadth (adding new companies) and in depth (deepening our relationship with existing organizations). We entered new geographies and reached new groups of readers in workplaces and the community. 2017 was the year of the short story; in teams around the world, we used short stories to explore the human condition side-by-side with the challenges and issues facing modern workplaces. 2017 was also a research year: we learned, synthesized and studied the mechanisms of Books@Work and its impact on participants and the organization.

In this Annual Report, we are delighted to share our progress and impact in 2017, as well as the scientific foundations, and some of the outcomes, of our work. Specifically, we will highlight one element of this work – the power of high-quality interpersonal connections to drive productive and healthy organizational cultures.

But most importantly, we thank you for your partnership and support as Books@Work expands across the country and the globe. We are honored to break down barriers and build up companies and communities, and to foster safe, healthy and meaningful human environments through shared narratives. And we are proud, humbled and grateful to have you by our side.

Ann Kowal Smith
Founder & Executive Director



Felix M. Brueck
Chairman of the Board



WHAT IS BOOKS@WORK?

Books@Work fosters the connections that create cultures of trust, respect, inclusion and productivity. Through dynamic literature discussions, facilitated onsite by professors, Books@Work transforms individuals and organizations from the front line to the C-suite.

Books@Work is an inquiry-based approach to engaging individuals at work and in the community. The text provides an initial context and an invitation to explore personal and collective narratives occasioned by the story. The literature is both catalyst and pressure valve, provoking conversation while providing a safe space in which to retreat.

Books@Work sessions are open-ended opportunities to practice and develop habits of mind, habits of heart and habits of interaction. The collective nature of this work unleashes powerful outcomes, supported by our own evidence and by rich multidisciplinary research.

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"Steinbeck said it best: 'You can't hate a man once you know him.' Getting closer to people that you work with makes working easier."

THE SCIENCE OF BOOKS@WORK: IT STARTS WITH SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

In the golden age of social media and the Internet, we're more – and less – connected than ever. But as we develop newer and faster technology to keep in touch, we're experiencing a remarkable drop in opportunities for meaningful face-to-face connection.

Leaders, scholars and gurus agree that organizations with open and collaborative cultures are the most productive. Interpersonal connections are the currency of the modern workplace – yet few companies invest in strategic initiatives that nurture these connections from the shop floor to the C-suite.

Over the last several years, we have found that investing in the space between colleagues yields the most critical returns. Authentic social connection – within teams and across hierarchy and function – forms the heart of a high-performing workplace, driving

everything from inclusion and wellness to team effectiveness. With increasingly diverse workforces spread across multiple geographies, we ignore the health and vibrancy of these connections at our peril.

In this Annual Report, we will highlight evidence from our own work, supported by organizational scholarship, that high-quality connections (what Professor Jane Dutton of the University of Michigan calls the “dynamic living tissue” of organizations) foster the very outcomes so many organizations are looking to achieve.

The following section features excerpts from our blog, where we regularly visit topics linking high-quality connections with diversity & inclusion, wellness, team effectiveness, culture change, organizational dynamics and more.

INCLUSION & DIVERSITY



A culture of inclusion must be a safe place for people to examine and question their deeply-held beliefs. Research shows us that interpersonal contact reduces bias – diverse groups working side by side begin to see themselves first as equals. To develop high-quality connections, Books@Work starts with a foundation of interpersonal contact – contact across hierarchies and functions but also contact with the diverse characters in narrative literature. The opportunity to use a story to explore personal experience creates the platform to question our biases and shape our willingness to learn more about others.

Books@Work is not a management training program or a “one-and-done” intervention. Connection and belonging take time, and must include everyone. We deliver Books@

Work seminars from the C-suite to the front-line, whether machinists, nursing assistants, truck drivers or janitors. Our most successful programs serve senior management and the front line – often together – to create the human connections required to fuel authentic cultures of inclusion.

PRODUCTIVITY

What about using time “away” from work to connect more deeply to your co-workers? In a fascinating tech-enhanced study, MIT’s Alex Pentland used bluetooth and infrared-activated socio-meters to measure the human interactions of 80 call center employees. Those individuals who talked to more co-workers got through calls faster, felt less stress and had similar approval ratings as their peers. In his infamous red balloon study, Pentland demonstrated that mobilizing large groups of people with incentives to share information socially results in powerfully fast outcomes. These social networks “lubricate information-sharing and teamwork,” permitting people to work better together to achieve a common goal. The social connections we create as human beings are critical to unlocking our success as a group.

Taking a break through Books@Work has been a lovely surprise to our participants, for reasons too numerous to mention in one post. But through our research, we see the program’s power to use the break from work productively – to build networks that enable us to better accomplish our work through the power of “just reading a book and [using it as] a way to get to know other people.”



CREATIVITY & PERSPECTIVE



In a recent Books@Work session with police officers and members of the community they serve, an officer had an aha moment about his personal work history during a discussion about Chinua Achebe's short story "Dead Men's Path." In the story, an ambitious young man named Obi becomes the new headmaster of an African school. But in

executing his vision for the school, Obi ends up alienating the local priest and villagers who surround it. Upon reading the story, the officer shared that he, like Obi, was once too zealous and too focused on rules and regulations. In the session, the officer acknowledged the role his former partner, also in the room, played in helping him to see the nuance he needed to adopt as he matured in his role.

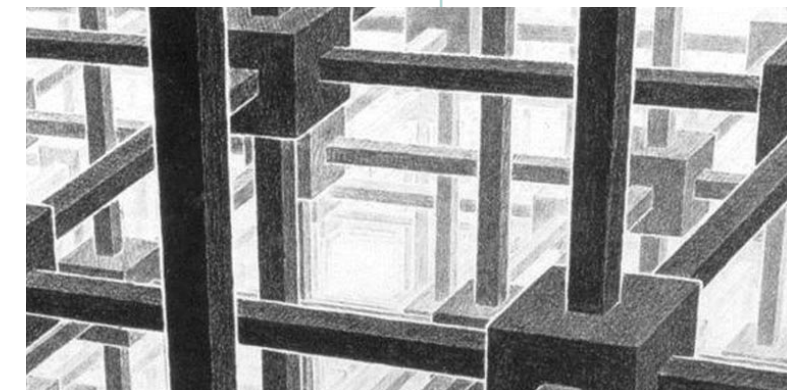
We don't always get the results we want from sticking to our usual work processes. But solitude or a change of scenery may not be sufficient in triggering creativity; sometimes we just need a space and an opportunity to interact with others, to share ideas and hear new perspectives. Often, social connection is the best incubator for the kinds of innovative ideas that transform our lives.

INNOVATION

Like a sponge, the organization is an amalgam of diverse individuals. We tend to believe that creativity and innovation come from the employees assigned to these tasks – R&D, marketing, innovation teams and the like – but to limit our beliefs this way ignores a wealth of potential at every level of the organization.

Books@Work mines the depths of individual experience, both personal and professional, and creates opportunities to build the trust and the active networks to openly share them. In marveling at the skills of her peers, one participant imagined her team stranded on a desert island. In discussing Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars*, an end-of-the-world novel, the team explored what skills they would each contribute to their own survival.

The realization that each individual has a deeper, often unexpected, well of skills permits participants to envision ways to see the potential in partnership and collaboration. This practice in trust and openness can't help but bleed into the workplace – relationships, once formed, present new avenues to solve problems and approach challenges collectively.



TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

At Books@Work, we "practice" psychological safety with literature. Team members learn about each other – how they think, how they express themselves, what they value, what they worry about. Isn't it easier to be vulnerable when everyone else is doing it too?

Recently, a leadership team at an international manufacturer engaged Books@Work as part of a larger initiative to improve team effectiveness. "[Books@Work is] extremely valuable because it's an area where you can practice with no penalties," one team member told us. "That's really the value of it is saying, 'Guess what, guys? For the next hour, you are all equal.'"

Another team member found that the communication skills practiced in Books@Work spilled over into the team's day-to-day dynamics. "It's helped just our overall dialogue as a team. . . I think it's helped with a much freer flow [of] conversation in the meetings." Said another, the program encouraged "being more frank with each other and finding ways to be either more transparent or more open with the discussion."



LESSONS LEARNED

- B@W partners with other strategic initiatives, complementing their desired outcomes with open-ended opportunities for cross-functional and cross-hierarchical conversation.
- B@W creates a shared language: the unique aspects of a given story create metaphors for collective understanding that continue to provide resonant touchpoints.
- B@W celebrates difference but eradicates division: the discussion of literature is uniquely suited to bridge economic, educational and cultural barriers through collective reflection.



"There is a deeper understanding of each other after exchanging personal insights and stories. One team member said that this was the most genuine form of community building and culture creation they have experienced."

2017 BY THE NUMBERS

80 programs
14 states
5 countries
160 professors
2103 participants
260 titles
42 colleges/universities
30 companies/organizations

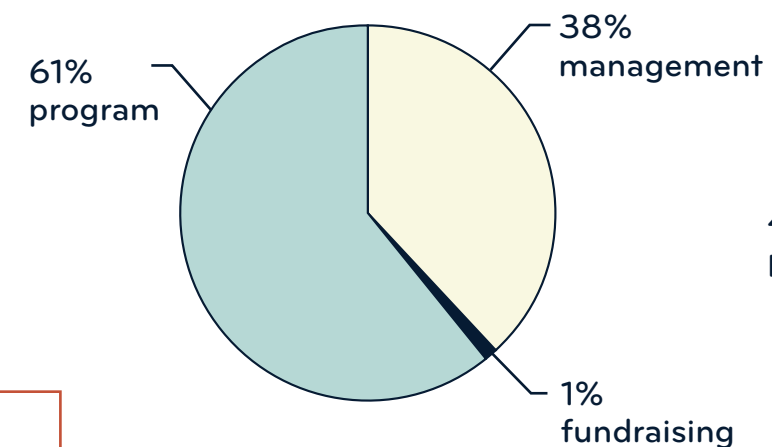


"It really helps people to openly communicate. Genuinely, actually communicate. . . I think there's something beautiful when we open up to each other that just allows us to be more vulnerable and be more true and be more honest about what's going on."

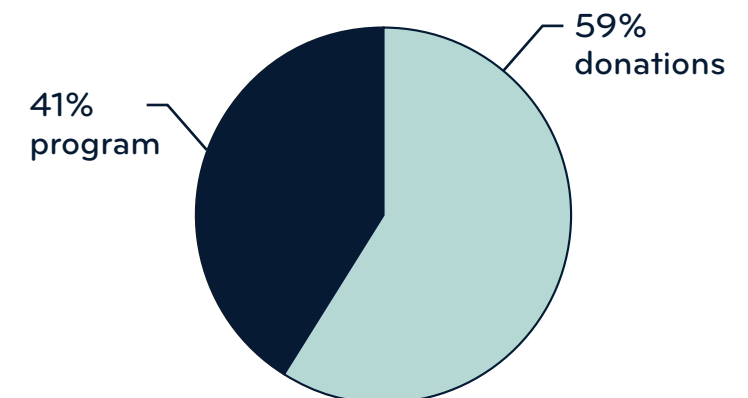
FINANCIALS

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$350,575

USE OF FUNDS



SOURCE OF FUNDS



*In addition to the donations and revenue used for programming, in 2017 we set aside \$90,434 to add to our Funds Balance for community-based programming and future use.

THANK YOU

You – our donors, partners, participants and professors – give life to Books@Work. Your dedication to lifelong learning helps individuals, families and communities. You are making learning accessible and inspiring. Together we are breaking down barriers and building up workplaces and communities.

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