

**INTERVIEWER:** This is an interview with professor Deborah Ancona for the 150 Infinite History project. Professor Ancona is currently the CLE Distinguished Professor of Management at the MIT Sloan School of Management and Faculty Director of the MIT Leadership Center. Her pioneering research into how successful teams operate has led directly to the concept of X-Teams and distributed leadership as vehicles for driving innovation within large organizations.

She received her BA and MS in psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and her PhD in management from Columbia University. Thank you, for speaking with us Professor Ancona.

**ANCONA:** My pleasure.

**INTERVIEWER:** So let's start a little bit by talking about your background in terms of your upbringing, your family background and where you're from.

**ANCONA:** Well, I'm originally from New York. And my family background, I come from a medical family, actually. My father was a doctor. My mom was a medical social worker. My brother is a doctor. So very much a medical family, a family where education was highly stressed. So our job was to go to school and learn and do well.

We also traveled all over. Several families, my own included, we would go together, actually. We had a great deal of fun all over the world. We went through the Yucatan, to Panama and Costa Rica and Guatemala and all through Europe. And we would trek around.

These were not fancy vacations, but trekking around learning was really a dominant value as well as family and extended family. We would frequently get together with grandparents and aunts and uncles. And so the notion of family and learning and education was dominant.

**INTERVIEWER:** And that travel experience is invaluable as a child and growing up. How much did that influence your curiosity about the world, about understanding how people think and interact with each other?

**ANCONA:** I think it probably had quite an impact because it was just eye-opening. In fact, I've never thought about it, but my future work is all about going out. It's seeing from the outside because it opens up new ways of thinking, it exposes you to different ways of living, different value sets, and so I think just opening up the mind.

It was incredibly important and fun, a sense of adventure, that one could go out and just have a good time in terms of understanding what the world is like. We're part of a global economy right now. So if you're ever going to understand that, I think you need to get out and see it.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how much pressure did you have in this family full of doctors to follow in their footsteps? And how hard was it to forge your own path?

**ANCONA:** I'd say very hard. So I still, to this day, I think, consider myself the black sheep of the family, which is odd, being a professor at MIT. But yeah, my father very much wanted me to be a doctor.

And when I went off to college, I went off as a physics major. I'm not sure why, but I was pre-med and following in the family pattern. And I made it through physics, even though I'm embarrassed to say, I wrote a note on my final exam saying, please give me a seat or something to that effect.

But I kept it up. Sophomore year, I went to chemistry. It was vivid for me, sitting in chemistry class.

And the bunsen burners are there. There's the smell. There's the periodic table on the wall, and all of these people coming in in pre-med mode.

And I sat there for while. And I said, I hate this. I don't want to do this. And I remember quite distinctly getting up and walking out of that class and never going back again to the hard sciences.

I loved the social sciences. I always have. I just, I'm going to get back into psychology and other arenas. So that was very hard, deciding at that moment that I had to do something that was right for me.

I never liked blood. I'm a big fan of the medical field and have a great deal of respect, but it wasn't right for me. So it was tough. It was tough to make that decision.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how did you explain that to your family, particularly your parents? And did they understand it? Or did this take some time to convince them you had chosen the right path?

**ANCONA:** Well, I think that they were a little askance about it for a while, particularly since I changed majors six times after that before I finally settled in. So I don't think they were happy. But I think, at the end of the day, they really wanted me to be happy more than they wanted a specific outcome. So I think that they were pretty content with how things turned out.

**INTERVIEWER:** And then walk me through these six majors that you experimented with and which one you ultimately chose and why.

**ANCONA:** So I had taken a great deal of French throughout high school and had also gone to Switzerland. And so, for a while, I was a French major, first French language, and then French literature. But then I realized that, although an interest of mine continues to be-- I'm a Francophile from way back, and I love all things French. Not all things, but many things French.

I moved and experimented quite a bit. So I was an urban planning major at one time, an urban studies major. And then I moved into sociology and ultimately ended up being a psychology major. So that was kind of a road until I found the thing that I found really most intriguing and interesting.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what was it about psychology that really drew you in because, obviously, you were a Renaissance student, having seen the world and really had the ability to try these different subjects that all seemed interesting. But what honed you in on psychology?

**ANCONA:** I think I just had this incredibly intrinsic interest in human behavior and seeing what happens to people, whether it's the Milgram experiments and how people, because of authority figures, do all kinds of horrible things. Or I was particularly intrigued with teams, what impact teams have on people, so how students would be in a group. And there would be these pictures of lines. And because two people in the team would say, oh, those lines are unequal, even if they were equal or the opposite, they would say they're equal when they clearly were not, then people would conform to that idea. And I just found it very fascinating to see how humans interacted with each other and what kinds of behaviors they illustrated under different kinds of conditions.

**INTERVIEWER:** And were there early teachers or mentors who influenced some of your academic choices?

**ANCONA:** Absolutely. I think probably the biggest influence on me at that point in time was a professor at Penn by the name of Marty Seligman. He's actually quite well-known at the moment.

And so I can remember taking a course with him and just delving into why do we dream. Why do we dream as human beings? And what does it mean? And what are the different interpretations?

And I think the notion that there were different theoretical lenses that could show you different elements of why do you dream, you could take an evolutionary approach to that or a more psychological approach to it. And why do we fear? Why are fear responses so quick to occur? It could be a learning model versus-- so there were multiple interpretations that one could bring to these very interesting questions.

And so having taken that course, I got quite interested in Marty's work on learned helplessness and then became, actually, a research assistant for him, which was great fun. I got into running experiments. So just the intellectual challenge of how do you really create an experiment that tests just what you want to test, and isn't testing anything else or is a very clear test of the question that you're looking at, was quite entertaining and fun for me.

And Marty also used to have these seminars where he'd bring us. I was an undergrad, so I'm the lowly person in this group. But there would be PhD students and other grad students and other faculty, in fact. So we'd hear what was going on with the rats and what was going on in the lab and what was going on in field work all around, looking at this question of learned helplessness and how to overcome it and so on. So I think the whole idea of becoming an academic and majoring in psychology stemmed from that experience.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was there anything from your earlier childhood or adolescence that you, looking back, realize maybe triggered or laid the seeds for this later interest? Were you fascinated on the playground with how students came together in teams or how certain kids became leaders versus the others? Was this an early interest?

**ANCONA:** I don't know that I remember that, that well. I do think-- well, I guess it doesn't happen to everybody-- but adolescence is a tough time. And so I think, by its very nature, what we tend to do is try to understand what's happening here. What is my place here? And can I get a good map? So I think sense-making, which is a core leadership capability, now that we look at this whole notion of sense-making, of mapping, of trying to understand the human dynamics of a situation, I think sort of stems from that period where it's an important part of what you have to do in life to survive that moment.

**INTERVIEWER:** You have a BA and an MS in psychology, which you were just discussing, from the University of Pennsylvania. And then you went on to get a PhD in management from Columbia. A powerful combination. Describe what about these two areas of study made them the perfect match for you.

**ANCONA:** Well, I think Penn, I went into pre-med. So I was just lucky that, in addition to having great science courses, there was this whole array of things to look at. And so being a very broad kind of institution that enabled me to look around and experiment and try different things, I think, was great. The other thing about the University of Pennsylvania was that it has Wharton. It has an undergraduate business school.

And so there were a number of friends of mine at Penn who were in Wharton. And they would always give me a hard time. Oh, psychology, that's such a gut major, which it's not, by the way. It was not at the time. And I don't know where it is now, but it was quite difficult, actually.

And they were in Wharton. And so I said, oh, well, come on, what are you taking? And so we ended up having this bet of who would do better. And they all took Psych 1. And I ended up taking Management 101.

And so just luckily for me, that seemed like a really interesting domain in which to apply psychology because I was in my Master's degree working on mental health work and really found that very difficult and depressing, and so working in this other domain. So I think Penn just had great professors and a wide- range of opportunities to experiment, both in looking at research opportunities and going through a wide range of subjects. And Columbia was great because it was a new department.

And so there were all these young junior faculty who were engaged in all kinds of research. So again, I like to think out-of-the-box. I kind of don't like to just follow the steady stream where others have gone. So I think both places were both intellectually stimulating and offered a philosophy where you go out and learn and try new things. And so I think that was a good combination.

**INTERVIEWER:** And among your fellow students in management, did it give you a unique perspective to have the psychology background, whereas, maybe more of them were coming at it from a business-minded model?

**ANCONA:** Yeah, I think, absolutely. So I was armed with the psychology from the beginning. And I think, throughout that period, I would come at it now from an economic standpoint. So the major dominant voice, if you will, in business is actually more economics than it is psychology. And yet, I think that psychology plays such a big role in understanding what goes on in business or even predicting what goes on in the economy, that I think it was good to have that different way of seeing the world.

**INTERVIEWER:** Great. And the same year you received your BA from the University of Pennsylvania was the year that UPenn became fully coeducational, which was 1976. How meaningful was that for you? And what was it like being there at that time?

**ANCONA:** Well, it wasn't really that meaningful. In some ways, it was a step down because I came into the College for Women, and the College for Women, I believe, had harder standards to get in than the general college. So it wasn't clear that we thought this was such a great move, to be honest.

I grew up in the midst of revolution, right? So there was just incredible revolution going on, a lot of unrest around racial issues, gender issues. So way back in high school, I would be protesting. We'd protest. We had to wear dresses to school, so we protested the ability wear pant-- I know that seems ludicrous at this moment in time, but that's what we were doing.

It was the age of protest and the age where people were demanding opportunities. And so that was the culture that I grew up in. And so, in some sense, I think that those of us who grew up in that time period grew up with a sense of mission, a mission of equality, a mission that we could do it, a mission that we can go in and change and move up in all different echelons. So I think, as we saw those progressions, as the male-dominated schools became coed, those were seen as positive moves forward, even though, from a personal standpoint, we thought that the College for Women was actually quite good.

**INTERVIEWER:** And even though you have that personal take on it about the standards of the colleges at Penn, did you feel like you all were pioneers of sorts? I mean, you were fighting for these kinds of efforts in high school, you said, and then in college to see it actually come to fruition on a larger scale.

**ANCONA:** Absolutely. As I said, I think that, when you grow up in that kind of time, you do take on some of those values. And so I think a number of the women who were in these schools considered it this mission for women to be able to move forward to do the things that men could do. And that was in college as well as grad school.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how would you describe the climate you were facing as a woman at that time pursuing advanced degrees and choosing to pursue business management concepts even? Were there any particular hurdles?

**ANCONA:** Well I'd say it was an odd combination because, on the one hand, there were opportunities because of the consciousness that these schools had to do something. When I went to college, there was a, I think, 5:2 ratio of men to women. So I think that institutions were trying to bring women in and had a consciousness that they had to do something. So on the one hand, there were many opportunities for women to go ahead in advanced education and even in professorships.

On the other hand, I think that there was a lot of prejudice and bias against women coming in. I can remember, when I went to Columbia, going to speak to a professor and saying, well, I'm coming here. And I'm going to get a PhD.

And he looked at me as if I was out of my mind. And he said, what? Are you kidding? You can't. You're not going to be able to do that.

I don't know from whence that came. I mean, I've gotten in and, obviously, had the credentials to do it. I had a pretty good education and background.

And he just said, well, I just don't think that you can do it. So there was an incredible bias around whether or not - for some people, not obviously for everybody-- whether or not we can do it. And for me, that was actually useful.

I mean, there was this buildup of, well, what you mean? I'll prove you wrong. So it engendered, actually, more motivation in some ways. But there was clear bias around who would get chosen for TA-ships or what the belief system was about your ability to succeed.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how far do you think we've come? That wasn't really all that long ago. And then it's quite a difference from today. But just from your own personal experience, looking back, how far do you think women have come?

**ANCONA:** Oh, that's a tough question. I think we've certainly come a long way. I still think that there is bias. I still think that there are "old boy" networks, maybe new boy networks.

There certainly is progress. And women are moving ahead. But at some level, it's actually kind of still depressing, not just in the educational arena, but everywhere you look at top echelons, whether it's business or government or religion or wherever.

Women still are low in numbers. And so I think it's frustrating. So we've come a long way, but we are not anywhere near equivalency.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what are some of the lessons learned in that area that you would maybe share with young women today coming up either through academia or trying to get into management in the business world. Do you think they lose sight sometimes of the hard fight that it took others to get them where they are?

**ANCONA:** Well, again, so they're not armed with the kind of history that we had. And so I think it's harder in some sense. And I'm not sure that I would impose my caring about that issue on other people. We also have worked incredibly hard. And some people don't want to do that.

But I frequently will go and speak to young faculty or young doctoral students about moving ahead. And I think the most important thing-- in fact, it comes from our research on distributed leadership-- is you need to believe that you can do it. So I think part one is, believe that you can do it. Certainly, it's possible.

And it certainly is possible to be successful in your professional life and also have an outside life. I think that there are very practical things that you can do. And I think people need to step up and negotiate for themselves and chart a path and follow it. And so I think believing in it and then getting the networks of support together for people who will get opportunities or offer opportunities to you and being very efficient in your life so that you can be sure to make room for different things, I think it is possible.

**INTERVIEWER:** I was just curious if you ever ended up running into the faculty member at Columbia who told you this was out of the question to pursue your line of study. Or did you ever have any moment where you reconnected with the doubters?

**ANCONA:** The doubters, I did. I did reconnect with the doubters and said, see? Actually we became friends. He ended up being part of the group, in fact, when I graduated, my adviser.

And a group of advisers and some other faculty and some other students, we all went out for lunch after that. And he was one of them. So I think he got converted a little bit as well.

**INTERVIEWER:** And within the field of management, obviously, you could have gone a lot of different ways. What directed you towards focusing your efforts on how people organize themselves and leadership concepts?

**ANCONA:** Well, the leadership actually came later. For most of my academic career, I was a teams researcher. So as I mentioned earlier, I had always, always just found these team concepts fascinating. Why do some people just follow what's going on in a team? And so I was always intrigued by teams.

At the same time, when I was studying teams early on, the dominant mode of studying them was in the laboratory. And I had done a fair amount of laboratory research. And what I discovered was, well, that the big question for me was, does the work that we're doing in the lab work in the real world? Because we were studying depression in the laboratory, but depression, because you give students unsolvable anagrams, seemed very different than the depression you'd see in a hospital where people were really deeply depressed. And so it doesn't go with what you're doing in the lab. Some of it does.

And I'm a contrarian to begin with. So I would look for something new and different to pay attention to. And so my dissertation actually said, let's look at all the things we know from social psychology about what makes a team effective.

So we know clear goals and clear roles and positive ways of working together, whether it be problem solving or goal setting, let's test that in the real world. Does it work? And for good or for ill, I was a little nervous at the time. But when I did my dissertation research, it didn't.

So I studied 100 sales teams in the communications industry. And internal dynamics, so how well people liked each other, how well they did problem solving together, how they built up trust, their goal clarity, et cetera, all of that was associated with high team satisfaction and how well the team members thought they were performing. But when you looked at the relationship of those variables to team effectiveness measures for sales teams, bringing in revenue, for example, there was a zero relationship.

And luckily for me, that got published anyway, because it was such a surprising, jarring result that there was no result in an area where people had been studying this for a very long time. And so that became my calling card, as it were, the question. I wanted answers. What does matter? How do we begin to understand team dynamics and team effectiveness within an organizational context?

So that just was happenstance. I wanted to go outside. I did go outside. And there was this incredible, oh, my goodness.

All these models that were burnt into our brains, that we still to this day spend billions of dollars training people to do and that are written up in the best-selling text on teams, wasn't working. So I just became very, very curious. How can we solve this dilemma? How can we answer this question?

**INTERVIEWER:** And how exciting was that? It sounds like it was very exciting that you're finding this new area that other people in the same line of work or study had missed along the way somehow.

**ANCONA:** Yeah, it was great. That's not to say that all that work is not important. It's just that it's half the story.

And we were missing another half of the story because, when you put a team in context, understanding team context interaction is important. Whereas, if you're in the laboratory, it's not. You can do fine-grained analysis of group process in the lab.

So as I said, my first feelings were one of dread, because you never want to find a no finding in your analysis. But because it was so intriguing, we had measured it well, it was very exciting. It was, oh, well, what's going on? This is pretty neat.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how did you end up incorporating leadership as an area of focus, in addition to team building and team interaction?

**ANCONA:** Well, for most of my career, so after that dissertation result, I spent the next 15 to 20 years trying to answer the question. And the answer to the question actually ended up being this X-Team concept. So X-Teams are externally- oriented teams.

And so it turns out that, if you only focus inward on internal team dynamics, as a team, you can end up putting very strong boundaries around your team. The result of which you can very often fail because, if you're not understanding your external context, aligning with different interests within the organization and coordinating the complex work we have to do in organizations across different groups, that's problematic. So we developed this concept with lots and lots of different studies of what teams need to do across their boundaries and showing that it was, in fact, related to performance.

And then we started creating X-Teams. And they became a vehicle for leading change in organizations. So I think leadership was creeping into an interest.

And then some of it was simply the dean at Sloan. We had someone who had been teaching leadership for a long time. He was great.

Unfortunately, he did not get tenure. And so there was this big gap here where we had all these leadership programs. And no one was teaching leadership. So they asked me to do a course and then build a program.

And through that activity, we said, okay, well, this is MIT. So if you're at MIT, you can't teach leadership until there's a leadership model. And there was no model out there that really conformed to what we thought was a good way to study leadership.

And so I teamed up with three other people to begin to create a leadership model, pulling on a lot of other research that was done and our own research that resulted in what we call, The 4-CAP model, the 4 Capability model. And that was just the beginning to this question. Whereas, before, it was what makes teams effective, now we started asking the question of what makes leaders effective. And what are the contexts in which leaders, in fact, can thrive and build teams?

And again, somewhat the contrarian, so in the teams domain everyone was looking at internal dynamics, and my whole work was about external networking and boundary spanning and the importance of that. And in the leadership domain, the focus really was on the traits and characteristics of the individual person in a formal role.

I love to go into organizations. I love to really understand phenomena from the inside out. And when you really go into organizations, it's never just the one leader who's making change happen. It's a complex interaction of multiple leaders and other people who can move new products ahead, who can create new processes, who can, in fact, invent a good strategy for the organization. And so my contrariness, if you will, brings me into new domains and pushes me to look at things with a slightly different lens.

**INTERVIEWER:** Great. Stepping back a little bit to when you first came to MIT, how did you first end up here when you came in 1985? And what attracted you to it?

**ANCONA:** Well, I don't know. Maybe we should talk a little. The reality of it was that I was teaching at another school and had thought that it was probably time to leave. But my husband was also-- he was not my husband at the time, but we had decided that we were going to be together. So in fact, my choice of location was pretty geographically limited.

So I was looking at a school in Boston. And there was no job offer, actually, at MIT. So just because there were a lot of interesting people. And they were very phenomenologically oriented, which again, had always been my way of working, what is the phenomenon you're looking at. Go and learn from what actually is going on and then put the theory and the practice together.

And that's all of what MIT is about. I mean, this "mens et manus", theory and practice, it's really how can the practice inform the theory? And how can the theory inform the practice? And that interplay was always quite attractive to me.

But why MIT? Partially because I want to be in Boston. And so I came as a visitor because they needed some classes taught. And then I stayed for another 27 years.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how much did that mean to you when you landed here and found a great fit in areas that you were interested in, the approach that a place like MIT took to issues?

**ANCONA:** I'm sorry, what?

**INTERVIEWER:** How much did it mean to you to find that fit? I mean, you came here. You said you didn't have a job, per se. But it sounded like it was quite a fortuitous marriage between the way you were approaching your fields and the way MIT did.

**ANCONA:** Well, it was great. It was really great. I always tell this story in my classes about culture and the fit with culture. I tell this story. It's my purple shoes story.

So when I was at this other institution, it's a young junior faculty-- in the book it said that, in order to succeed, you had to do great research, teach well and do service. Those are the three major things.

And so I was moving along in those three domains and thought, oh, things are going really well. And then, one day, the head of my department came in to chat. Always a bad sign when they come to chat.

And so there we were chatting. And I'm trying to figure out what's the messaging here because I knew there was a message. And finally, it came out that I was wearing non-tenure track shoes. And it actually took me some-- like, shoes? What does shoes have to do with anything?

They were purple. They weren't high heels. They weren't open-toe. They weren't open-heel-- I'm pretty conservative-- but they were purple. And in that institution, purple shoes were non-tenure track shoes.

And so coming to MIT was great because no one cares what you wear. In fact, if you look too good, I think that it's somewhat problematic. It's not about what you wear. It's not about what group you're with.

MIT is really about big ideas. It's about big ideas and taking the time to really understand things and study them in ways that other people can't. And so it was great to be in a place where there weren't those kinds of rigidities and things that seemed to me to be really unimportant in some respects. It was all about the work here. And so I consider myself quite lucky to have landed here, where no one's going to come into your office and tell you about your purple shoes.

**INTERVIEWER:** MIT would welcome the purple shoes.

**ANCONA:** Maybe.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's a great story. What was it like here being a female faculty member when you arrived? Were there any obstacles or pros and cons? Any particular challenges?

**ANCONA:** You know, I think that this duality that I spoke about earlier is really always present. On the one hand, there are many opportunities for men and women, I think, particularly women. Sometimes they want women in administrative positions, in power positions, et cetera.

So I think all of that was good and probably helpful. And I think, like other places, there are battles to be fought and resources to be negotiated. And sometimes I think you are pushed away from certain things because you're female.

I mean, that's in keeping with a lot of the research that's done. So women are more collaborative. Women are more relational, in general. Not everybody, these are clearly generalizations.

Women are more apt to speak for the team they're with than they are for themselves individually. Women don't negotiate as hard as men do. They stop earlier in a negotiation process. So all those things make it more difficult to move in any kind of organization. So I think some of those things are true here as well.

**INTERVIEWER:** And just since we're talking about that point, do you think any of your models about distributed leadership and changing the way we've normally done things in the business world will help women break through some of those barriers, when you don't have that all-powerful, maybe, male CEO in a top-down way of thinking?

**ANCONA:** I don't know. I think it will remain to be seen. So that was my belief, that, when we have more distributed kinds of leadership, when we have X-Teams where multiple people are moving outside the boundaries of the organization and bringing things in, which in some sense, is a way of empowering people, at the same time, in a distributed system, people are very dependent upon networking, external networking, and being able to access information and resources and modes of alignment. And I think sometimes, for some women, those skills are still hard.

I'm not a feminist researcher. And I'm in a very male-dominated world. So most of my work is with men, not with women. But the people who teach from a more feminist perspective would say that some of these looser kinds of organizations actually are harder. I don't know that we know the answer yet to that.

In any case, that's the direction we're moving in. Information technology means that information is more distributed to many more people. And so if we are to have organizations that build on the collective intelligence of many more members than just people at the top, then we need to have distributed leadership. So I believe that that is the direction we are going in. And so we have to learn what it is and how to harness it effectively.

**INTERVIEWER:** How were your ideas about management and organization first received by companies and groups with male-dominated leadership? As you said, you're often dealing with a very male-dominated industry in business.

**ANCONA:** Quite well, actually. And I think that's part of where MIT has its strength. That is, we go in and we say, okay, we think X-Teams are a great way to go or sense-making is a key leadership capability.

And if you just came out and said that, well, you're just saying it. But because of the work we do here-- I have 20 academic articles that very clearly, from qualitative work to quantitative work, show that there is data to support the fact that these teams are more effective than more traditional teams and that, increasingly now with the leadership work, that the leadership capabilities that we have identified are identified with leadership effectiveness.

We're still not there yet, because we're just collecting data on distributed leadership and how having not just great leaders at the top-- so we're not getting rid of the leaders at the top. We need great leadership the top. It's just that it's enacted in different ways. And there are multiple leaders up and down the firm.

And leaders in organizations know that these things are happening, that there are new modes of operating, that there are more collaborative mechanisms, that people do need to reach across boundaries. I mean, this is the most interconnected world we've ever seen. In some sense, a lot of that work was before its time.

This is a world of bridging boundaries and moving across. So I have not had much of any resistance to these ideas. I think people are hungry for them. And we've had great, great fun.

We have X-Teams all around the world who are doing fun, creative, innovative things. And there are organizations you can walk into, and they're talking about sense-making, envisioning and relating and inventing and have you done your sense-making lately? So it's quite fun to go out and take the theoretical ideas into the world and watch them take off.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, a lot of people think academic models don't really have real world applications. But you've obviously been highly successful in making that link and having the performance to prove it, that these aren't just things in a classroom or that your thinking up in the academic halls of MIT.

**ANCONA:** Well, so I have an advantage in that sense because I'm an empirical researcher. So the theoretical development starts, actually, with the phenomena in the real world. So you've got that kind of external validation to begin with.

And yes, I think the other thing that's quite amazing about MIT is we have a big executive education program. We do a lot of work with other organizations around the world. And so there is an opportunity.

I have to say that there's also a transition. So for the early part of my career, as in most places, it's all about getting tenure. And getting tenure is all about academic research and getting your publications in the best possible places. But for the latter part of my career, and certainly as the director of the MIT Leadership Center, it has been more about can we use these theoretical ideas in the real world and make a difference? And so MIT is great, again, in bringing together this idea that theory and practice can come together and can make a difference.

**INTERVIEWER:** MIT is known, of course, for its intense, high-pressure environment among the students. It's a very tough, competitive place. Are there any similarities on those scores when it comes to life for the faculty here?

**ANCONA:** Absolutely. Absolutely. This is a crazy place. So the students say that coming to MIT is like drinking from a fire hose. That's the word on the street, as it were.

And I'd say that's probably double for the faculty. So you're doing your research, and there are all these PhD students who are interested. And you could spend 24 hours a day-- well, maybe not 24 hours, but-- all day, every day going to seminars.

Around chemistry, you couldn't even go to all the seminars, even if you spent your full day doing them. There are just so many people who are coming here, academics and practitioners coming. And because you're at MIT, so many people want to connect with you in some way, shape or form. So I just sit in my office.

And just take this fall. And I was invited to come and help on a big project in Egypt to improve their research by bringing in team and leadership skills. I was invited to go to Istanbul to work with another university that is partnering with us. I was invited to India, both to teach and to do some work with another leadership center.

So the number of opportunities, it's hard just to even respond to them, much less continue to do your research work, your application in the real world, your work with students and the larger challenges and opportunities that are just thrown at you daily. So it's all amazing. And it's a lot.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what is it about MIT, do you think, that leads experts like yourself to choose it over many other institutions that do great work in all kinds of different fields? What is so special about this place? It's certainly unique.

**ANCONA:** I think part of it is freedom, freedom to search out the problems that you're interested in and go and pursue them in any way that you want. So no one says you have to study in this way or you have to study this topic. Not that a lot of other schools do that, but I think there's even more freedom here.

I think that there's a spirit of innovation. Go and do it some other way. And pick up different lenses. And study whatever the phenomena is. So I think there is a real spirit of innovation here.

Very smart people, they're really smart people here. We are very lucky to be in a place where people pull you in all kinds of new and different directions. No one's shy, right? So if you're thinking about going in direction A, then someone will say, well, have you thought about? And have you thought about that?

So it's a culture where people bring in other perspectives and ideas. And it pushes your thinking. And so I think that's unusual.

And add to that this real interaction with the real world. MIT is engineering at heart. I mean, the beginnings are an engineering school. And so being able to show not that something is solely theoretically important, but that it does really work, for me anyway, is a very refreshing way of looking at the world. And I think it pushes both theory and practice in better ways.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how has the institution changed since you've been here?

**ANCONA:** Well, I think the fire hose, in some sense, has gotten even bigger. It's a global world. And so there are even more pulls and more opportunities and more things to keep up with. So there are many more journals and more people doing things around the world.

So I think that the fire hose is bigger than it's ever been before. I don't think this is just MIT, but certainly information technology is different. So although it's supposed to make our lives easier, every day I know I'm going to open that email and there are going to be hundreds of people who are wanting things. So I think that the demands are actually greater.

I think that the academic world has gotten even more competitive. And so the push on our students to publish earlier and to get things out and to get more things out and to hit those home runs is even stronger than it was before. And I think that's a hard world to navigate or a harder world, in some sense, to navigate, more opportunities, but a harder time navigating.

**INTERVIEWER:** And particularly for the students, that sounds like it could have a negative consequence as well. Because you're in college, the more pressure on you, the less time you have to do those other things in your college years to find yourself or develop who you are as an adult. Do you feel for these kids? Or do you feel like--

**ANCONA:** Oh, I do. I really do feel for these kids. So I have less to do, actually, with undergraduates. I don't teach that many undergraduates. I do more Masters teaching and executive teaching than I do undergraduate teaching.

But I do feel for these kids because I think that there's a pressure. Particularly now, with the economy being what it is, there's so much pressure to decide early, to say what you're passionate about early. And given my own experience where I had the chance to really experiment and look at different things, I had the real opportunity to take an area that I was interested in, teams, and spend a long time.

There was not so much pressure to publish, publish, publish. And so I could go and live with my teams and really understand them from the inside out. And I think that's probably harder to do now.

**INTERVIEWER:** You mentioned some early mentors who were influential on you. Do you still have mentors today? And also, are you finding yourself in the position of being a mentor?

**ANCONA:** I still do have some mentors today. When I have a big question, I tend to go back-- actually, not so much to my undergraduate, I've lost touch with them, but-- to my PhD mentors, some of the mentors within the MIT community. So I do go back.

Certainly not as much as I used to. It is more the reverse, me as mentor to my graduate students or, as I said, to women. Women will often come and say, well, how did you do that? And so yes, I find myself more in the mentor role, both as an academic mentor to people who are studying teams and leadership, but also to women who are trying to figure out how to forge a career.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how rewarding is that? It sounds like you have a lot of things pulling you in different directions and schedules and pressure. And the fire hose is getting just larger, as you said. But how important is that to help these other women who need some guidance in this hectic environment?

**ANCONA:** I think it's very important. I probably don't do as much of it as I was like, just because there are so many other pressures. But I do see it as my job because I am tenured and, therefore, can go out on a limb and can fight some battles.

And so I will frequently sit a doctoral student down and say, you know what? You offered to do all these things for me. And that's very nice of you, but it's not good for you.

That's a mistake. You're never going to be able to-- and I think women are more prone to do that than men. I'll say, don't do that. You need to focus on what is it that you want to accomplish and how are you going to get there.

**INTERVIEWER:** What kind of leader would you say you are in your role, either as the director of the Leadership Center here or in other aspects of your life?

**ANCONA:** Well, I would say I at least try. I don't always succeed, but I try to be a distributed leader. That's the new domain that we're really researching at the MIT Leadership Center.

So I do try to work collaboratively with people. I do try to understand who has expertise in an area and let those people lead with the area that they have interest and skill and passion around. So I do try to get a lot of people involved and engaged.

**INTERVIEWER:** And are there any lessons from these leadership models that you all have developed that work outside of the workplace or the business worlds, the relationships people have?

**ANCONA:** Yeah, actually, some of the frameworks. We have one framework called 4-Player model that actually comes from family systems where people are looking at family dynamics, more so than business dynamics. And we build on that and bring it into the organization.

But I think it goes back the other way. A lot of the work that we do focuses on the idea that, if you're too internally focused, whether it's in your own mind or as a team or as a family, you can get very inertial. And so the wonder of an X-Team or external sense-making is the idea that you can be more innovative in whatever you're doing if you go out and-- Marcel Proust used to say that-- I don't know the exact quote, but-- if you want to discover, it's not so much seeing new landscapes as seeing with new eyes.

And part of what going out does is let you see the world with new eyes. And therefore, your creativity can be increased. So whether that's for you personally, because you're a gardener-- go and see what other people are doing and try experimenting.

A big part of our inventing is experimenting and going out and trying new things and seeing if they work, and adjusting, given that information that you get. I think visioning, which is a core leadership capability as well, is not just about organizations and figuring out the future and what they want to move to, but it's also personal people taking the time to reflect on where they want to go and what they want to do and who they want to be and then setting forth and inventing creative ways to get there. I think those are life skills.

**INTERVIEWER:** And speaking of family, what kind of climate do you think there is here to balance work and family, the eternal challenge?

**ANCONA:** The eternal challenge, yeah, everybody talks about that. Well, it's obviously possible because, when I came to MIT, I was single. And after that, I got married. And I have four children. So clearly, it is possible to both be a successful academic and to raise kids.

And I think you just have to make the time and organize the time. And you have to delegate, where delegation is possible, and decide also where you don't want to delegate. So what are the things?

So those are the first things that go into my calendar. What are the things that are absolutely essential for the family and essential at work? And I ask my kids that.

I say, okay, I'm not going to be able to go to every game. But what is it that is most important for you? And that helps them too, to think about what are the priorities? Where do I really want Mom?

And in some cases, as they get older, my kids-- I have two in college and two in high school now-- increasingly, don't want you there. So it's nice, I think, for them to think that I have a life and I'm not dependent on them for their life. So I say, well, what's most important? And if you can do that prioritization, what's really key here, then I think it really helps to focus you on what it is you want to accomplish, both in your family and in your career.

**INTERVIEWER:** And in your case, your children are older now. When they were younger, it was right when, basically, you were starting your career here at MIT or around then. I mean, that's a lot to deal with at the same time, coming together. Did you have any secrets back then? Or did you have moments where you thought this is actually more difficult than I imagined?

**ANCONA:** Well, I was very lucky. So I don't know how people do it when it is that crunch. So I had children late. So I worked for 10 years before I had children, so I had already established.

And you had to teach. And I had a research record going up. So I think I had it easier, in some sense, than most people did because I had a 10-year running time, if you will, to get things established and go in with my teams and so on and so forth.

But I also think bringing those two worlds together, I don't know if it's crazy or not. But birthday parties, we always had very creative birthday parties. And I would do all these team exercises. Here, I am. I'm the teams person.

And so we would do all these team parties with a theme associated with them. And I would get everybody engaged with setting those up and creating the books and the exercises and whatever it is we did at that time. So I think pulling together in those ways is also helpful.

**INTERVIEWER:** And it gives your children a glimpse of the other part of your life as well.

**ANCONA:** It does. It does. And I don't know if this is a relevant story, but in our leadership classes, we'd do this exercise where, in terms of vision, you think about-- there's a steel rod exercise, the notion that, when you really, really believe in something, you can get that it's a steel rod that you're going to do, no matter what, or follow through like it's something that's not bendable. It's not shakable.

And I can remember my daughter coming home one day. And she was having a tough time in math. She was in honors. And so I said, oh, maybe you should come down from honors or we should get you a tutor or we should do some things.

And she turned around. And she looked at me. And she said, well, Mom, what about that steel rod? I can do this. And so I thought that was really funny because I'd bring some of those ideas and exercises which, as I said, I think are helpful to people. And they work.

**INTERVIEWER:** What is the mission of the MIT Leadership Center that you lead?

**ANCONA:** Well, the mission of the center is actually quite equivalent to the mission of the Sloan School, which is, to develop principled, innovative leaders who make a difference in the world and to develop great theoretical concepts to support new, cutting edge in leadership.

**INTERVIEWER:** And one of the blurbs for your book, *X-Teams, Leadership In Action*, says that good teams often fail because they're looking inward instead of outward. You spoke about this a little bit earlier, but can you expand on that a little further and why that's so critical?

**ANCONA:** Yes. Well, we have a fair amount of research that says that teams that are too cohesive and look inward are not as successful. And that goes for individual leaders as well. External sense-making is absolutely critical. And it seems to be getting more critical.

And I think part of the reason for that is that the world is moving much more quickly. We're globalized. We're much more interconnected.

You really need to know what's happening in other countries, what's happening in different parts of your supply chain. And so you can't really clearly develop a direction that is going to get you where you want to go, if you don't have a map of the external context because you need to understand where the market's going, where technology's going. What's your competition doing? What is it that's being developed in another place?

We recently did some X-Team creation with a company called Li & Fung. They're a Hong Kong-based company. And we created a whole bunch of X-Teams there because the way they operate is, every three years, they come up with a new strategic direction.

And in between, they move to make that direction really work. And then they shift again, as a way of adapting to a fast-changing environment. And it was so clear that the external work helped them to decide on what new directions they would go in. They had a number of ideas and another set of assumptions. But going outside, helped them to test those assumptions.

And so if you're going to be coming and putting together, let's say, a new information technology strategy or a new way of collaborating within the organization, then going out and seeing how is it done in other organizations, not that you're going to be able to just pull that in, because each organization has its own unique culture and way of operating, but to gain some understanding, to build on the shoulders of others, being able to test assumptions. Okay, well, we want to go and bring new brands to China.

Well, what's happening in China is important. There's a new rising middle-class. And does that rising middle-class want the same things as the people who had been wealthy for the same time?

Go out and test that. Go bring customers together. Say, are you more willing to buy this? Or do you really want this kind of thing?

So just all of our experience shows that this going outside helps you to better understand the world in which you are operating and, therefore, to have a common map from which you can take action, from which you can develop innovative solutions, and that really hones the direction you're moving in, in a way that better fits the world that you're currently living in. And if you rely on older models, you're in trouble because the world has passed you by. And so you come up with solutions for a world that no longer exists. And so you need to get those maps.

Organizations are political arenas. And so you really need to understand the political dynamics of a place. Who's supporting what you're doing? Who's not supporting what you're doing?

Well, can you bring those people who don't support you around? Why don't they support what you're doing? That helps you to understand, maybe, some things that are wrong or some ways that you might shift what it is you're doing or how you're doing it. And so this whole notion of going outside before you go inside just helps in adaptation in a quick-changing, dynamic, interdependent, very complex world that we're all trying to navigate.

**INTERVIEWER:** What have you seen are some of the biggest obstacles to convincing organizations about this X-Team model? Is it the interoffice politicking that you just referred to as a hierarchy? Or is it fear of change?

**ANCONA:** Well, it's many things. In fact, the editors of the X-Team book that we wrote kept saying, well, why is it? If we know that teams should go external and get externally- oriented, why don't they do that?

And I'm not sure of the answer. I think there are many different-- and nothing, behaviorally, is understood by one model. So there's, perhaps, an evolutionary piece to it that, in the olden days, if you weren't part of a clan, if you weren't part of a group and really part of that, you were more apt to run into danger in the external world. So you would come in.

There's a lot of groups theory that suggests that teams are very stressful environments for people. You worry are you going to be taken into the group. And will the group be able to function?

And so there is a phenomenon, that's called solution-mindedness, that team members are more comfortable to the extent that they can come together quickly and move into action. And if you follow teams longitudinally, teams that are externally-oriented, first are not as satisfied in the short-term because the stress and anxiety of not having "the answer" or knowing where to go is hard sometimes for team members. And so you have to forestall that anxiety in order to get a better map.

And over time, because you're better able to adapt to the environment, the organizational environment and the larger external environment, teams actually become more satisfied over the long-term if they follow this external approach. But there is initial resistance because of whatever, evolution or these psychological processes or the need to show that you're moving in and getting things done. Increasingly, a lot of organizations want to move quickly. Let's get things done.

The real mantra is, do it. Get it done. Get it done as soon as possible. And so time after time after time, when we do our leadership programs or our X-Team programs, people will say that external sense-making or boundary-spanning was the most valuable thing, if only because you gave me permission to do it, to say it's important to understand before you act and to give people the skills and to show them how much external sense-making they can do in a short period of time-- you don't have to spend years doing it.

Great leaders do all kinds of external experimentation. Look at Gandhi. Gandhi, they asked him to join the Indian Independence Movement. He said, I don't know anything about India. And he spent a year understanding it and bringing that perspective to the revolution that eventually took hold.

You can look at Steve Jobs. Steve Jobs is a great sense-maker, understanding where markets were going. He wasn't so good on some of the other skills. But in terms of that ability to read the external environment, people feel like they don't have a luxury of doing that. And so it often doesn't happen.

**INTERVIEWER:** You made some excellent points about how the X-Team model impacts the thinking of employees and how they adapt to it. What are some of the new demands placed on them with this distributed leadership model as well?

**ANCONA:** Well, there certainly are demands to step out, to make yourself known. The organizations that we've been studying so far-- this is, again, new research-- are ones that excel in distributed leadership. So there are a number of things that you have to do in order to succeed in a distributed leadership world.

One of them, as I mentioned before, is this notion of leadership self-efficacy. You need lots of people coming up with new ideas and not being afraid to put them out on the table and test them and vet them and so on. You need the ability to pull those ideas into teams so that it's not just you bringing it forward, but you get all the people together in a team that need to pull it ahead.

Organizations need to develop, what we call, a global mindset. So increasingly, leaders are called upon to help everybody understand where are we going with all this. So freedom doesn't mean freedom to have chaos or freedom to do whatever you want. It's freedom to take some of goals of an organization, which you help develop in a distributed leadership organization, but to move forward within certain guidelines and guard rails.

So helping people understand that is part of what's needed in a distributed organization, stepping out. It's just like X-Teams, distributed leadership places where-- it's tough in organizations these days. In one company they call it, they're looking for triple-word scores.

It's not enough to have an idea in R&D or something that's going to hit the marketplace. It's got to be great technology that makes it in the market and where the organization can make a profit. And if it doesn't have those things, you don't have any extra resources any more.

And so having, what we call, creative-- we don't call it, actually, the data suggests-- creative collisions. That means that people have to go and reach out to people who have different ideas and different expertise and bring those people together and have the confidence to then be creative in pulling those ideas together and taking them through and marketing them in the organization. So it requires quite a bit from leaders.

**INTERVIEWER:** Are there any lessons to be learned about the role of leadership and how it's changing in today's society from the financial crises we've seen in recent years?

**ANCONA:** Yes, I think there are. In fact, we just finished doing a three-day workshop in which we had students use one of our models to analyze excerpts from the film, *Too Big To Fail*, which is all about the economic crisis. And we actually look at the interplay between Bernanke and Paulson and Geithner and Congress and the banks. It's just incredibly fascinating to look back at the behaviors there.

And again, all these things that we talk about come into play, the ability to sense-make about the other group, the ability to do some perspective-taking. So if you want Congress to move in a particular direction or you're trying to guide the banks, being able to put yourself in their shoes so that you're better able to figure out what are the ways to get them on board with something that you're looking at, certainly larger sense-making, this notion of a global mindset. If all you're looking at is, okay, here are these derivatives, how do I make them better and earn more money without taking a broader mindset about what can that do, thinking about what could go wrong, thinking about what could that do to the larger economy or what is my responsibility to some other people, so having a sense of not just looking inside. Okay, well, I can get this thing to be better without really doing the sense-making to think about the implications of those actions, I think, is part of the problem.

Of course, this is 2020 hindsight. And so I think a lot of people were surprised. But there were people who were not. And part of the whole leadership in a distributed organization is doing risk mitigation and is listening to people whose job it is to think about what could go wrong and to surface that as part of organizational effectiveness.

**INTERVIEWER:** Why do you think these models are so critical, particularly today, with the amount of economic anxiety, almost more from the bottom up, how they could help people in dealing with some of this economic uncertainty, if more companies got on board with some of these ideas and new ways of thinking?

**ANCONA:**

Yeah. So increasingly, over the past, we go out and talk to lots of different companies and lots of different schools and so on and so forth. And we bring the models. And there are many different ways to deliver a discussion.

And increasingly, I've asked to do Leadership in the Age of Uncertainty. How do you deal with the fact that there is a huge amount of stress? And people get very nervous and internally focused.

And they either don't move because they're just thinking about what's going to happen to me. Or they do the opposite. They move in all different directions.

So let's try this. Oh, let's try this. And they never stick with anything long enough to see if it's the right move or the wrong move.

Or they get into a rigid stance. So they can't innovate any more because threat rigidity is a well-known phenomena in the social sciences. That's what happens.

So these leadership behaviors become increasingly important. So sense-making, if you're not sure what's going on in the world, being able to offer someone a map or the opportunity to create a map. Okay, what's going on out there gives them confidence and hope and some kind of framework from which they can act and move and understand. If you understand what the situation is, rather than saying, oh my goodness, I don't understand, I don't know what to do, say Okay, this is what we think is the world. Let's try some things, and it gets people from a stress reaction into action and effective action. So I think that that's very important.

Leaders in these times need to understand that, under conditions of stress, there is a higher need for leadership. People crave more leadership during times of stress. And so being visible to people, being able to say, yeah, I understand what's going on, not falling prey to, okay, they need a leader and so I'm going to become the dominant parent figure to the children here, but really to say yes, these are hard times, but this is what we're going to do to move ahead and meet these challenges. Having those kinds of conversations are incredibly important and having just also some emotional management.

So it's not as if leaders are immune from these very same things, right? So there are a lot of people who are stressed and uncertain, so being able to recognize this is a hard time. And so just like people who I'm working with, the tendency in hard times is, okay, I want to go high. I want to close the shutters and the equivalent of get under the covers and just don't come out for a while. And so it takes a lot of emotional intelligence, if you will, to be able to say, okay, this is what's going on. But at this moment, I need to gather my resources and not batten down the hatches, but in fact, reach out because it's even more important than it was before.

**INTERVIEWER:**

There's an often-held view that there are leaders and there are followers. How much do you think that leadership abilities are innate in some sense? Or how much can they be learned?

**ANCONA:**

Well, so I hate the word followers. I just hate it. In a distributed leadership world there are multiple leaders. Sometimes they lead, and sometimes they follow.

So it's not that there are the leaders and the followers. Those are different roles that are taken on at different points in time. So I just hate that word, on principle, because I think what it does is put in our mind the picture of someone's here and everybody else just follows.

And even if you're an effective follower, you're engaged. You're coming up with ideas. It's not just this cheap idea of moving in that direction. So I don't like the idea of followers. And I'm sorry, what's the second part?

**INTERVIEWER:** How much is leadership ability innate or learned?

**ANCONA:** So this question gets asked all the time. So what are we doing here? It's all innate. And General George Marshall answered that question by saying, "Leaders are born and then made."

And I guess no one can argue that people come to this world with different arrays of skills. So some people are more extroverted. Some people are more charismatic. Some people are just better able to innovate. That's the nature of the beast or nature of man, I guess.

So certainly, some leaders are made. And it's easier for them to become leaders. But there are lots of ways to develop your leadership capabilities. And I think we wouldn't be doing the work that we do, if we didn't really fundamentally believe that.

And there are many, many, many examples. Let's go back to Gandhi. When Gandhi started leading in the Indian Independence Movement, his wife had to bribe people to come and listen to him speak. He was such a horrible speaker that she would say, oh, come for tea. And the only price being that you had to come and listen first.

And I love that story because, within a number of years, he was mesmerizing millions of people because he believed in a cause. And because he believed in that cause, he developed the skills that he needed in order to pull people together. So I think that leadership can be learned.

I also think that part of the learning process is not setting yourself up to fail. That is, if you say I want to be whoever it is that you choose, some iconic leader, I want to be a Steve Jobs or I want to be a Gandhi is difficult because your personality, your skills, your experiences, your values may not mesh with that person. You say, oh, what a great leader.

No, the key to developing leadership is really to understand what do I bring to the table? And what's the best way for me to lead from the things that I do well? We remember the most charismatic. So that we remember the leaders who are your visionary, charismatic leaders. Those are the leaders that remain in your brain.

And yet, there are a lot of other ways to be successful. There are leaders who are great leaders because of their great sense-making. There are leaders who are great at leading because they're great at inventing new ways of doing things.

There are people who are inventing new ways to bring water to African villages. And they're leading the way in that domain. There are people who are understanding water and who are figuring out how to deal with those kinds of issues.

There are leaders who see new ways of working across sectors, so the business world, the government and the NGOs can work more fully together. They're inventing as they go. They are trying new things. And so maybe they're not charismatic.

And in distributive leadership world, sometimes the leader actually pulls back. It doesn't make you less of a great leader. It just means you lead in different ways. And so I think, if people figure out what it is that they think is important to create and they figure out what their strong suit is, what we call your leadership signature, figure out how you can lead people, you can develop in all different kinds of ways. And it's part of that process that's my privilege to be a part of and watch.

**INTERVIEWER:** And you mentioned the X-Team model can play to women's strengths, but also some of their weaknesses. They sometimes aren't as strong at networking and making these external connections with people. In the distributed leadership model, what are the pluses and minuses for women, I guess, in terms of finding more parity with men in the business worlds?

**ANCONA:** Well, I think it's the same issue. There's more of an entrepreneurial spirit that goes in a pulling together of a network and of moving things ahead. And so there are lots of women who are doing it. I mean, we have lots of cases of women, and many of them, who do wonderfully in that role.

Again, there is some work that says that, for some cultures-- actually, it's not just women, for some cultures-- it's much harder to step out of your range. It's much harder to say, I'm going to lead from where I am, rather than follow some hierarchy. Many people are trained to follow a hierarchy or to remain in bounds. And so I think it just takes a little bit more work, if that's an issue to figure out how to step out of those boundaries that may be produced from upbringing.

**INTERVIEWER:** You're very passionate, clearly, about your line of work. What do you enjoy most about the work you're doing and the change that you're trying to make in these areas?

**ANCONA:** There's a lot that I enjoy. So I've always been an academic. So I do still like bringing new ideas to the fray.

I don't always have as much time as I would like. But this whole new distributed leadership model, I'm very excited about that. I'm very excited about we have data from a 360 that's based on our model of the 4 Capabilities. And it's been really interesting looking and, again, pulling out the evidence that something like sense-making makes a difference in leadership effectiveness.

So it's one thing to say it. It's another thing to bring out those nice equations which enable you to say, here's the data. And that's what it says. So there's the research side.

We just finished, as I said, these three-day leadership workshops where we really bring students to delve deeply into the 4 Capability model that we have and to do action learning, to practice what it is. And so they really, really understand the models. And they also really look at this question of, what is my own leadership signature? And what is it that's important to me in terms of what it is that I would like to do with my leadership skills?

And bringing students through that process, we're reading through now some of the reflection papers and seeing that students do say, oh yeah, this is really important to me. And now I feel like I can take on this project or I can take on-- that is so much better than, for me, just teaching some theory, is really helping people to develop through theory. And as I said, the X-Teams, we haven't gotten to doing more distributive. We're still studying that.

But how great is it that you pull people together. And you give them some tools. And they figure out, okay, in Japan, this is what the people are wanting. And so let's bring those products to that country.

Or I did some work with vehicle design, a team here at MIT-- actually, a few years back-- that was developing a 200-mile-per-gallon car and prototyping. And I went with them to Italy to study what they were doing because they were prototyping there with the European car designers. And they took a course with me on X-teams. And their whole organizational form was based on an X-Team model.

So there they were in Italy with these teams from China and Africa and Europe all coming together and working on doing something. Why? Because if GM and Toyota weren't going to do it, they were going to do it. And so to be a part of that and to have tools that enable that to happen more effectively, I don't think it gets better than that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Those are the moments when you say, we're making a difference. And it's all coming together.

**ANCONA:** Exactly.

**INTERVIEWER:** It must be nice. I asked you before, what about MIT draws talented people like yourself to come here? And you gave some great answers. What is it about MIT that you think inspires people to change the world, to change the way we live, to think in big steps, not small innovations?

**ANCONA:** Well, I think, in some sense, it's all around. We at MIT Sloan, the mission is to develop principled innovative leaders-- it says it-- to change the world. I mean, we say that. But then there are all these huge projects, right?

So we have these cross-MIT projects in energy and sustainability that are really not only telling people, students, faculty, but doing it. So there are role models around. There are people who are saying, hey, we can make a difference. And here's how.

And so there are many, many initiatives like that. MIT supports initiatives like that. And so I think, for all the idiosyncrasies that make us who we are and some of the odd characters that are around, at the end of the day, that's what we publicize.

That's what we do. That's where resources go. That's what people are putting their heads together around.

And so I think this is a place that does what it says. It says that that's what it's going to do. And it goes ahead and does it.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how do you think MIT is doing today in terms of welcoming female students and faculty into the fabric of the culture here?

**ANCONA:** I think everybody is going out of their way to make that happen. I know, for many years, I was on one of the many gender committees that came out of the whole study of women in science who originally brought up the idea that, hey, wait a second guys, there's an inequality here. And I think to MIT's credit, they didn't dismiss that. They didn't say, go away and be quiet.

President Vest, at the time, took those women very seriously and said, we're going to do something. And as a result of that, those findings were published. It wasn't that anyone tried to hide them, as was done at some other schools. And each of the major schools on campus created a gender committee.

And as I said, I was on that committee for many years. And so part of what we looked at is, are there inequalities? So we would run the data.

We would look at salary differentials. And we would try to look at promotion differentials and say, if there were inequalities, what could we do to help them? Who needed to be matched? We interviewed matched pairs of men and women in similar areas.

And so I think the school has really gone out of its way to say, what can we do to create a more welcoming environment for women? How can we be sure that, once somebody comes in, there is more equality in terms of-- not more equality, there is equality in terms of how much people make and what opportunities are available and so on and so forth. So I think MIT is doing quite a bit to make it a more appreciative culture.

**INTERVIEWER:** And for the students, similarly, how do you think they're doing, in terms of opportunities for female students as well as male?

**ANCONA:** As I said, I know I get called upon to speak to students, particularly women students. So they are making those kinds of opportunities available to hear about how have you done and what are some of the ideas of how to make it through. I know that there are all kinds of organizations of women's groups who are helping to bring mentorship opportunities and role models into MIT.

We have a female president. And so that's, right there, a very good sign of, again, a role model that has come up and done excellent research, also has a family, and is also a leader in terms of thinking about how can we use all the different skills that are here at MIT for the betterment of the world, and a real commitment to that for men and for women.

I don't think it's perfect yet. I think that there will always be challenges. But I think that MIT is facing those challenges head-on. And to its credit, when something's pointed out, they invent.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how would you like to see MIT evolve in its next 150 years, either in your line of work or in general?

**ANCONA:** Yeah. That's a little bit of a hard one because I don't think we know. I mean, there's so much coming out in the world of technology and so on. But I guess I think I like to see MIT continue as a world citizen.

I think we have reached out across many, many boundaries to-- you know, there's a revolution all around us. All you have to do is go to wherever it is, China or Russia or Turkey or Singapore or places in South America. It's just the energy and revolution that is taking place as countries that have weak educational systems are growing their own universities at a rate that is unprecedented and unbelievable. And helping to do that and playing a leadership role, I think is great, figuring out new solutions.

We have so many problems, whether it be water or pollution or poverty, the whole global warming even. So it's hard because people don't even believe that there's a problem. So you really need to bring the social science change together with the hard science.

What do we know about how to fix these problems? And how can we develop greater technology and understanding in order to move forward? I mean, I think if MIT continues to play a role bringing both technological and managerial and understanding of people and processes to come together to solve these big world problems, if we could do that, I'd say that's a game plan for moving forward.

**INTERVIEWER:** Great. And the last question, if you weren't in the line of work you're in now, given some of your diverse array of interests, what do you think you would be doing?

**ANCONA:** Oh, well, that's a good question. What do I think I'd be doing? I don't know. I often think that, as I look, certainly, I have a lot of time at MIT doing what I'm doing. But looking beyond, what would I do, in fact, post that?

I have a degree in counseling psychology. And I have now all this leadership work and teamwork, is to bring that to where it's most needed. So more in the practice side than some of the academic side and in areas of women and children and poverty and working with people to overcome those issues. So making more of a difference in a different realm would be one thing.

I don't know. I'd like to spend more time on the creative side, whether it would be in the gardening realm or some other realm. I think it would be more in terms of helping people in need. There's so many gross inequities right now. If I could even play a small role in working with people to move ahead in that environment, I think that's what it would be.

**INTERVIEWER:** Great. Well, it's been a pleasure talking with you. And thank you, so much, for your time today.

**ANCONA:** Oh, well, thank you, for the opportunity.