



# Quality of Relationships



BOOKS@WORK

2019

Annual Report

# The difference between a group of individuals and an effective team or community is the quality of their relationships.



## Letter to the Community

Dear Partners, Participants, Professors, Supporters and Friends:

To talk about 2019 in 2020 is hard. To remember 2019 is harder still! But we look back with deep gratitude, not only for all of you, your partnership and your support, but for the foundation we built with your help.

Ironically, 2020 has afforded us the clarity of 20/20 vision. We see a world wracked by disease, uncertainty, distrust. Societal discourse is fractured and angry. The pandemic cast a bright light on the shakiness of our social systems and the extent to which we lean heavily on people whose jobs require them to live precariously.

In many ways, the last thing the modern workplace needed was social distance – the physical separation imposed by COVID has left people isolated at home or at work, without many of the usual supports they had come to rely on. Social disconnection drives a stake in the heart of belonging, inclusion and

collaboration – the very outcomes we need more than ever.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Books@Work has pivoted to virtual platforms and, although we are starting to see in-person meetings again, we believe that virtual programming will stay front and center for a long time to come. And despite the proverbial “Zoom fatigue,” participants tell us that Books@Work provides a valuable measure of connection and a needed chance to sort through the challenges the world continues to face – together.

We appreciate 2019 not because of nostalgia for a world forever changed, but for the investments we made in understanding and improving our craft. 2019 brought a sea change in our growth. We partnered with new, global companies from diverse industries and continued to work in natural teams and across hierarchies. In the community, we continued our weekly commitment to the veterans in the VA Domiciliary, and worked with police officers and adolescents, using stories to

build bridges for the future. We moved away from books in many organizations, using short stories in the majority of our programs.

In 2019, we also broadened our work in diverse contexts. We supported culture change and wellness. Many clients sought Books@Work to augment their diversity and inclusion initiatives, enabling colleagues to have open and frank discussions starting in a relevant story. We continued to support teams, but worked more closely with their leaders to enhance collaboration and collective skills.

We have sharpened our commitment and our ability to build the collective capability of communities. The outcomes we need most – inclusion, innovation, collaboration – depend not only on talented individuals but on the quality of the relationships among them. In these pages, we share a new framing of the relational skills required through a simple equation, supported by decades of academic research and by our own data and the comments and observations of our participants.

## What is Books@Work?

Books@Work facilitates story-based conversations that deepen social connection and foster inclusion, at work and in the community. Stories offer a unique lens to explore diverse perspectives, unlock ideas and reframe assumptions. Books@Work develops the collective skills required for inclusion and collaboration: trust, respect, creative risk taking, courage to speak up even when others disagree, and open acceptance of different points of view.

Grounded in scientific principles, the Books@Work approach helps groups embrace a shared humanity as an integral ingredient to innovation, creativity, productivity and inclusion. We work around the world, in multiple languages, with colleagues and neighbors from diverse experiences.

In her 1993 Nobel Prize Lecture, Toni Morrison reminded us of the importance of narrative to nurture a connected humanity. “Word-work is sublime,” she explained, “because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference – the way in which we are like no other life.” Specifically, we have seen how stories open us up to different realities, new perspectives and diverse points of view. This rare space for collective reflection provides colleagues insight and surprise, connection and creativity. As one participant expressed, “I love this program because I am changed after reading and discussing these ideas.”

In this report, as we do every year, we pause to consider our lessons learned and to express

our gratitude to the many people and organizations we work with year over year. We have a wonderful and tireless team – healthy and intact – and we delight in the opportunity to continue to learn and grow with our partners and participants.

Thank you for your belief in our mission and for your support.

Sincerely,

Ann Kowal Smith  
Founder & Executive Director

Felix M. Brueck  
Chairman of the Board



# The Power and Purpose of Collective Skills

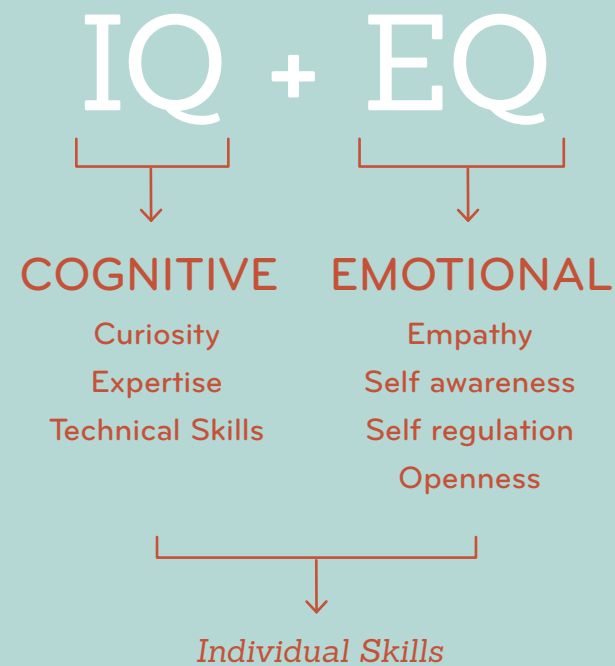
Books@Work rests on the belief that the difference between a group of smart, capable individuals and a high-performing group is the quality of their relationships.

But we rarely take the time to invest in these relationships.

Throughout our lives, we are taught, graded, hired and measured as individuals. Yet most companies know that a successful, innovative and productive future depends on collaboration and teamwork. Getting there is the challenge! Books@Work helps to develop the collective skills that foster highly connected teams and groups.

1

Organizations are adept at developing cognitive skills. In recent years, many have realized the importance of, and added programs to develop, emotional skills and competencies. Together, these skills prepare individuals to thrive.



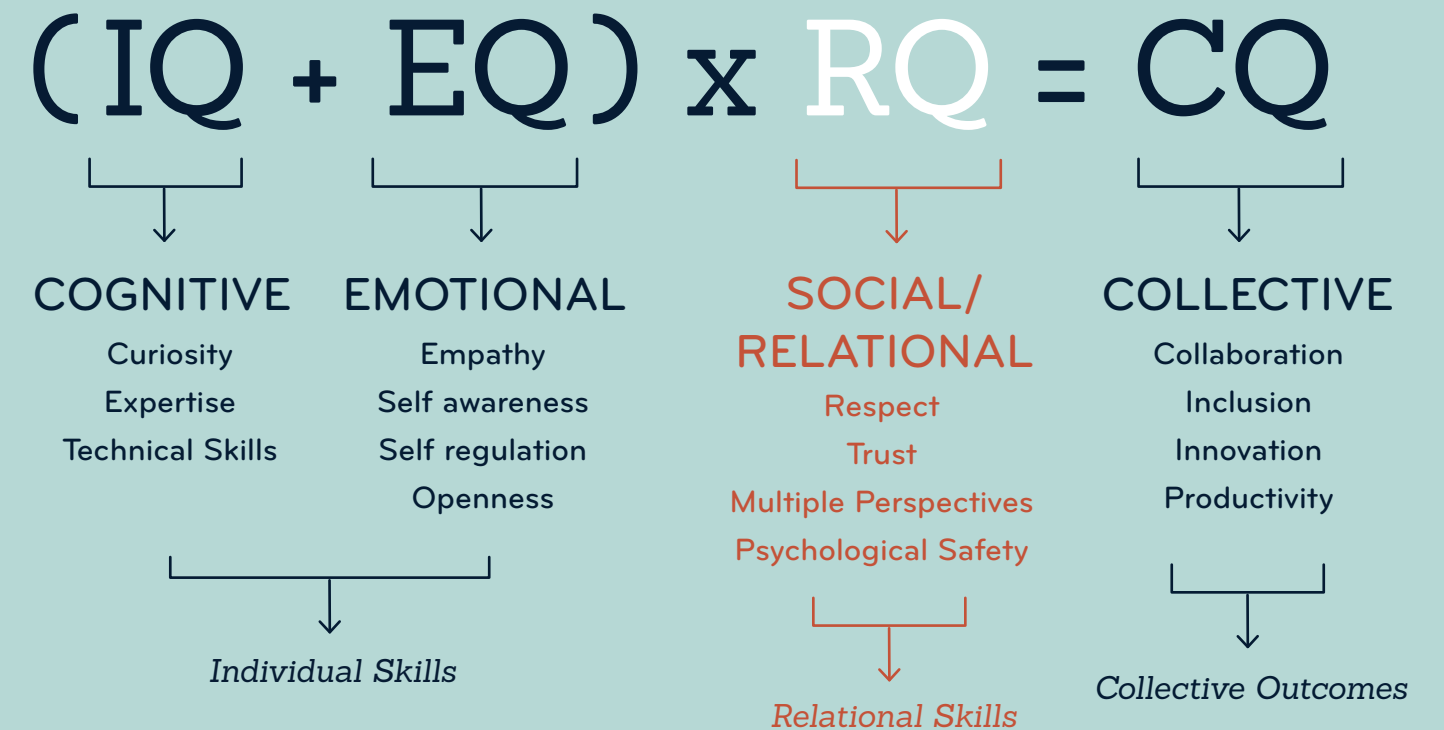
2

The outcomes organizations seek are overwhelmingly collective. Collaboration, inclusion, innovation and productivity require nimble, flexible and deeply respectful working relationships.



3

These relationships don't happen just because we want them. We have to build them. Only by investing in relational skills will we assure that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.



## What are relational skills?

Books@Work builds the relational skills to power inclusive, collaborative, innovative and productive teams and organizations. These are the skills that take time to develop:

- Trust and respect (genuinely built through humble inquiry and active, open listening)
- Awareness and openness to multiple perspectives (suspending your own beliefs to better hear and see the beliefs of others)
- Psychological safety (the authentic belief that a team or group is safe for interpersonal risk taking)

The operations matter. A group of individual contributors is additive. But a relationally-skilled group is multiplicative.

# By the Numbers\*

\*Counts are from inception through 12/31/2019

350

Programs

8,442

Participants

65

Companies/  
Organizations

123

Colleges/  
Universities

774

Unique Titles

324

Unique Professors

14

Countries  
(includes US)

25

States

7

Languages

*“In Books@Work, I saw relationships jump in the level of trust and openness. People shared and accepted each other for who they are. People trust each other. And people provided different points of view without worrying the relationship’s going to fall apart.”*

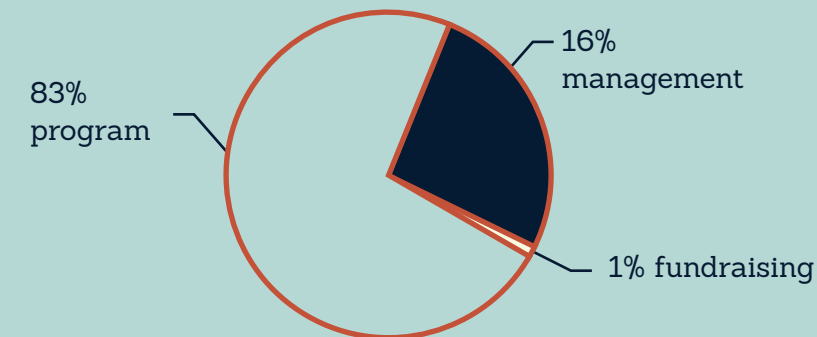
- Books@Work Participant



## Financials, Fiscal Year 2019

TOTAL EXPENSES (in \$ thousands): 396

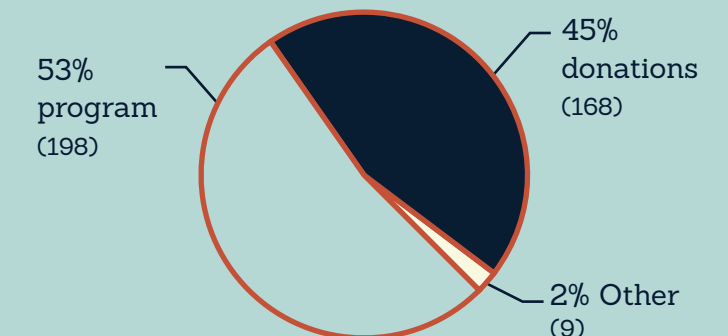
### Use of Funds



\* In 2019, 60% of our total expenses were covered by program revenue.

### Source of Funds

(375)



## Lessons Learned

- \* So many organizations are committed to learning and development and to the encouragement of individual skills. But supporting collective skills is rarely a priority.
- \* Stories create unparalleled (and low-risk) opportunities to bridge perspectives - especially in the context of inclusion and diversity where conversations can become weighty and sensitive.
- \* Innovation, inclusion, collaboration - these are outcomes that do not happen overnight. Each requires multiple voices, a shared context, and a commitment to learning from and with each other.

# Thank You

You - our donors, partners, and professors - give life to Books@Work. Your dedication to lifelong learning helps individuals, teams and communities. You are making learning inspiring and relevant. Together we are breaking down barriers and building collaborative workplaces and communities.

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The John Huntington Fund for Education  
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The Weathertop Foundation

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Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center  
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Wesleyan University  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

*“It helps you have more empathy for other people when you get to know them on a deeper level.”*

*- Books@Work Participant*

*“Books@Work helped me grow because as a white male, I’m starting to learn more and more about how society was built to be a white man’s world. The conversations helped me see advantages that I have, and even how someone first looks at me and gives me the benefit of the doubt, but doesn’t for others.”*

*- Books@Work Participant*



BOOKS@WORK

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