

# Editorial

## Classification or Organization – What’s the Difference?

by Hope A. Olson



Sitting at my desk recently, looking at a very satisfying stack of issues of *Knowledge Organization*, I noticed the words on the cover “formerly *International Classification*”. I had already been aware that the words were there and that the former title was indeed *International Classi-*

*fication*. Some people still recognize that title rather than our current one. Our roots in classification are very strong. When people outside of our field ask what the journal I edit is about I say “classification research”. Whether or not they understand, it seems to make a positive impression. Why do we still have the former title on the cover? Why do I use the word “classification” in describing the journal? What is the difference between *classification* and *organization*?

In asking these questions I took the route of a trained librarian and scholar – I found a reference source and looked it up. In this instance I turned to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. I began with the two definitions for *classification*:

### classification

1. The action of classifying or arranging in classes, according to common characteristics or affinities; assignment to the proper class.
2. The result of classifying; a systematic distribution, allocation, or arrangement, in a class or classes; esp. of things which form the subject-matter of a science or of a methodic inquiry.

Since both of these definitions depend on the verb, *to classify*, I looked that up as well:

### classify, *v.*

To arrange or distribute in classes according to a method or system.

This definition confirmed the three elements of *arrange/distribute*, *classes*, and *method/system* also present in the definitions of *classification*.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes quotations with its definitions and one in particular caught my eye:

1824 Blackw. Mag. XVI. 620 Another class of transgressions ... we shall now enumerate: ‘to compete’(an American discovery,) ‘to classify’(a barbarism which we are sorry to see, in the leading article of the last North American Review, No. 44. p. 42) ... This comes of inventing new words ‘for short’; ‘to classify’ is a charming abbreviation of ‘to class’; as ‘lengthy’ is of ‘length’.

I took this brief jibe to be against the convolutions introduced into English for unclear reasons, such as *orientate* in lieu of *orient*, and it sent me to look up the verb *to class*.

### class, *v.*

1. To divide or distribute into classes, to CLASSIFY. Obs.
2. To place in a class, assign to its proper class or group.

The first obsolete definition suggests that *classify* has overtaken *class* in this instance. The second adds a certain niceness of distinction between the two with reference to “its”. By implication *to classify* is something done to a group or aggregate and *to class* (according to the current definition) is done to one thing or being at a time. Looking back at the elements of *classification* it is difficult to envision arranging or distributing one thing, but it is possible to imagine pigeonholing one thing into a class.

What about *organization*? The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a plenitude of definitions for our study:

### organization

1. a. The action of organizing, or condition of being organized, as a living being;

connexion and co-ordination of parts for vital functions or processes; also, the way in which a living being is organized; the structure of an organized body (animal or plant), or of any part of one; bodily (rarely mental) constitution.

- b. The fact or process of becoming organized or organic; in Path. conversion into living tissue.
- c. concr. An organized structure, body, or being; an organism.
2. a. gen. The action of organizing or putting into systematic form; the arranging and co-ordinating of parts into a systematic whole.
- b. The condition of being organized; the mode in which something is organized; co-ordination of parts or elements in an organic whole; systematic arrangement for a definite purpose.
- c. concr. An organized body, system, or society. Esp. as social organization in Sociol. and Anthropol.
3. Mediæval Mus. The singing of the ORGANUM.

In addition there are many combined forms such as *organization man* and *organization chart*. The first two definitions suggest two very different conceptions of *organization*: one organic and one systematic. The former has biological implications and the latter includes social organizations. Nevertheless, both of these approaches suggest a connected whole made of integrated parts rather than either individuals or aggregates. The same senses are iterated under the verb *to organize*:

**organize, v.**

1. a. trans. To furnish with organs; to render organic; to give the structure and interdependence of parts which subserves vital processes; to form into a living being, or living tissue.
2. a. gen. To form into a whole with mutually connected and dependent parts; to co-ordinate parts or elements so as to form a systematic whole (with either the whole or the parts as object); to give a definite and orderly structure to; to systematize; to frame and put into working order (an institution, enter-

prise, etc.); to arrange or 'get up' something involving united action.

3. Mus. To sing the ORGANUM or accompaniment to a plain-song.

The reference to *organum* or its Greek-derived equivalent, *organon*, is also of interest:

**organum** [L. organum, a. Gr. : see ORGANON, ORGAN n.1]

1. a. An instrument; = ORGANON 1. [see below]
- b. An instrument of thought or knowledge; = ORGANON 2. [see below] Esp. in the title of Bacon's work called, with reference to the of Aristotle, *Novum Organum*, i.e. New Instrument or set of principles for scientific investigation.
2. Mediæval Mus. A part sung as an accompaniment below or above the melody or plain-song, usually at the interval of a fourth or fifth; also, loosely, this method of singing in parts, the most primitive form of counterpoint or harmony.

**organon** [a. Gr. ὄργανον instrument, bodily organ, etc.; the title of Aristotle's logical treatises; = 'instrument' of all reasoning; cf. ORGANON]

1. A bodily organ, esp. as an instrument of the soul or mind. Obs.
2. An instrument of thought or knowledge; a means by which some process of reasoning, discovery, etc., is carried on; esp. a system of rules or principles of demonstration or investigation; spec. title of the logical writings of Aristotle.

The organic aspect here is an instrument of the soul or mind and the systematic is an instrument of thought or knowledge.

So via medieval music, we come to a possible distinction. *Class* is from 17<sup>th</sup> century French derived from Latin. *Classify* is described by one source for the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a neologism. *Organization* and *organize* are derived from medieval Latin linked back to the Greek via *organon*. Classification seems to be a means of systematically arranging aggregates. It is a more modern appellation than organization. Organization, drawing on the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is more holistic, more organic, and has

links to logic and the mind. If we follow the link to *organum/organon* we find a direct link to knowledge.

So perhaps the change from *International Classification* to *Knowledge Organization* signalled the sophistication of our field as one that encompasses several means, not only classification, and seeks harmony between them.

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To add further to this discussion or agree or disagree please send a letter or message to be printed in *Knowledge Organization* to:

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Or continue the discussion on ISKO-L, the official electronic list of the International Society for Knowledge Organization. To join the list send an e-mail message to:

majordomo@ualberta.ca  
with the message:  
subscribe isko-l

*Please note revised dates for the conference*

**The Seventh International ISKO Conference. Granada, Spain, 10-13 July, 2002.  
“Challenges in Knowledge Representation and Organization for the 21st Century:  
Integration of Knowledge across Boundaries”**

*Call for papers.  
Second announcement*

The need for a worldwide communication system that can retrieve information efficiently, regardless of national and cultural boundaries, has become more and more pressing. New electronic environments (such as the Internet, where the world is at hand, where all cultures coexist, and where quality is low) have created this need. These new environments provide significant challenges for those dedicated to study and research on knowledge representation and organization. Similarly, the digitalization of information is responsible for increasing emphasis on the need for integrating models of knowledge representation and organization. Digitalization allows a huge amount of information to be stored and retrieved, and the challenge is to develop models to improve the management of information in this new framework. Traditional information retrieval systems face similar problems because we lack retrieval tools designed to integrate knowledge. In this situation, an in-depth examination of the integration of knowledge across boundaries is warranted.

Study of the integration of knowledge leads to other important topics. One of these is the concept of universality. New insights into universality needs to include topics geared to the revision of the concept, such as how universality was previously understood in knowledge organization, and what problems arose as a consequence of this understanding. Further, we need to move to a consideration of the concept of universality as it should be understood now, in the electronic era. How can universality be represented in conceptual structures? Integration of specialized knowledge across geographic or cultural domains can be a way to address this unsolved problem. Related to the same problem are topics such as how the integration of knowledge affects different subject domains and users, linguistic issues, and applications that support new models.

In addition, we need to look at equality in knowledge organization. This is an important aspect for supranational systems, and it means that we need a special focus on minorities so that we can represent them well in knowledge structures. At the same time, professional ethics needs to be reflected within this framework because knowledge organization affects the way people think about and perceive reality, and minorities and other similar groups may become invisible or wrongly conceptualized. Professionals need to be aware of these issues and should be attempting to solve these problems.

In light of these considerations, the integration of knowledge across boundaries is the general theme of the 7th International ISKO Conference to be held in Granada

(Spain) in July 2002. The Conference has two main objectives: 1) to analyze models for knowledge representation and organization, as a state of the art departure point, and 2) to propose new models, methods and techniques of integrating knowledge across boundaries in order to improve performance in the new century.

The conference will include the following specific topics, among others:

1. Epistemological foundations of knowledge representation and organization systems and theories
2. Models, methods and concepts for knowledge representation and organization: towards integration and universality
3. Professional ethics in knowledge representation and organization
4. Users in multicultural domain-oriented and/or general systems
5. Evaluation of supranational systems
6. Internet and the integration of knowledge: artificial intelligence, data mining, and multicultural systems

Researchers and practitioners involved in knowledge representation and organization are invited to submit abstract between 500 and 1000 words by September 15, 2001 to Prof. Maria J. López-Huertas. Electronic submissions in Word or RTF format are recommended (please include ISKO in the subject line) to the following address [mjlopez@ugr.es](mailto:mjlopez@ugr.es)

In preparing your abstract please include objectives, methodology and results as far as possible, and relate your topic to the theme of the Conference and indicate the category above to which you believe your paper belongs. An international programme committee will review the papers, and authors will be notified of decisions by November 15, 2001. The deadline for submission of papers for the printed Conference Proceedings will be March 1, 2002. Accommodation and travel information will come later.

**Venue of the Conference:**

Palacio de Congresos de Granada (Spain)

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