WORKSHOP
Evolutionary Biology and the Social Sciences

Harvard Business School
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Evolutionary Biology and the Social Sciences
Report by Terry Burnham

The Gruter Institute co-sponsored a conference with the Harvard Business School entitled "Evolutionary Biology and the Social Sciences: Enriching the Behavioral Model for Business Management." The conference was held March 27, 2002 on the HBS campus. Margaret Gruter of the Gruter Institute and Professor George Baker served as hosts. Oliver Goodenough and Terry Burnham were centrally involved in organizing and running the meeting.
Twenty-five participants were drawn from a range of disciplines including business management, experimental economics, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology. This eclectic group sought common ground in understanding genetic, evolved human nature, and its ramifications for business theory and practice.

Harvard University's Professor Edward O. Wilson, the seminal thinker and author on understanding humans as organisms evolved by natural selection, gave a talk on the current state of progress in the field.

In addition to his organization role, Oliver Goodenough (Gruter Institute and Vermont Law School) made a plenary presentation on selective attention as a biological adaptation and some other new avenues of his research. Other active participants included Ken Anbender (Contegrity Program Designs), William Clarkson (University of Buffalo), Nathaniel Foote (Center for Organizational Fitness), Anula Jayasuriya (Skyline Ventures), and Dorothy Weaver (Art Ventures Consulting).

The other main talks were given by David Haig (Biology, Harvard University), George Baker (Economics, Harvard Business School), Andrew Lo (Finance, MIT Sloan School), Terry Burnham (Economics, Harvard Business School), and Carole Hooven (Anthropology, Harvard University).

The conference was a full day bursting with formal and informal talks. The discussion moved easily from the most theoretical of issues to practical applications for organization design.