Adaptive Leadership for a Better Bank
Ronald Heifetz headlines Community of Purpose

On March 19, D&I coordinators, HR officers, and leaders of employee resource groups came together as a Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) community of purpose for a session with Harvard Professor Ronald Heifetz entitled “The Practice of Adaptive Leadership.”

SDN VP Rachel Kyte kicked off the session, with her initial reflections on her first six months. She was struck by the lack of diversity among staff but impressed with their passion and commitment.

“The first thing that struck me when I moved over from the IFC was how old this institution is. The average age of senior management is in the mid-50s. Second, the lack of diversity of thought and background, despite the enormous national and ethnic diversity,” said Kyte. “Third, we have almost no churn. To hire new skill sets, one can’t recruit from the outside.”

But we also have great strengths, she said.

“There is a true passion and commitment to the original mission of the institution. There is a tremendous energy and a desire to take risks.”

“The real insight for me has been working with clients around the business case for diversity. It is stunningly clear in the way GLBT are treated in the workplace, ethnic and racial minorities are treated, and how women are treated in management and boardrooms—the evidence shows that diverse teams perform better for our clients,” enthused Kyte, who went one step further. “To develop that data set further would be revolutionary to offer to our board, our shareholders, and our clients.”

Ronald A. Heifetz is the Senior Lecturer in Public Leadership and co-founder of the Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He quickly endeared himself with a flattering first line: “I’m always moved that you are willing to take on impossible problems in the world.”

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But what about those meetings where people are marginalizing you because you’re different—because you are a woman or a minority?

“It’s a tactical mistake to focus on your own marginalization, because people will address that politely, but then marginalize you further,” emphasized Heifetz. The irony, he said, is that by depersonalizing the exclusion, you stand a better chance of getting your point of view included.

“Your job is to keep your point of view on the table, and don’t give people a distraction by calling it diversity or inclusion.”

D&I staffer, Pauline Ramprasad, concluded the event: “We do this so we all will have a common understanding. Spread the word that this Community is going to be a real agent of change for D&I in the institution.”
Kahneman Urges Better Decision-Making

During a leadership discussion on March 14, Nobel Prize-winner Daniel Kahneman challenged Bank Group managers to test themselves and their peers more before making important decisions.

Before you make that big decision, Kahneman urged, leaders should ask themselves a number of questions (see box below).

The questions help people recognize personal assumptions, evaluate arguments, and draw better conclusions.

Kahneman’s best-selling 2011 book Thinking, Fast and Slow has drawn comparisons to Malcom Gladwell’s Blink for its capacity to help readers rethink the way they think about thinking.

“It is always a sublime pleasure and a true honor to learn with you,” enthused Julie Oyegun, “so thank you all for making the time to come together to engage with yet another exceptional mind during the WBG March Celebration of Diversity.”

To Managers and Leaders: “Before You Make That Big Decision...”

Ask Yourself:
1. Is there any reason to suspect the team making the recommendation of errors motivated by self-intersect?
2. Has the team fallen in love with its proposal?
3. Were there dissenting opinions within the team? Were they explored adequately?

Ask the Recommenders:
4. Could the diagnosis be overly influenced by an analogy to a memorable success?
5. Are credible alternatives included along with the recommendation?
6. If you had to make this decision again in a year’s time, what information would you want, and can you get more of it now?
7. Do you know where the numbers came from? Can there be unsubstantiated numbers, or extrapolation from history, or a motivation to use a certain anchor?
8. Is the team assuming that a person, organization, or approach that is successful in one area will be just as successful in another?
9. Are the recommenders overly attached to a history of past decisions?

Ask About the Proposal:
10. Is the base case overly optimistic?
11. Is the worst case bad enough?
12. Is the recommending team overly cautious?
All People Want to Do Is Live Their Lives

Contributed by Elizabeth Howton, External Affairs Unit, SAR

“All people want to do is live their lives.” Dr. Suneeta Singh made that simple yet powerful statement during a panel discussion on “Empowering Gender Minorities in South Asia” on March 14, 2012 at the World Bank.

Dr. Singh, a former Bank staffer and CEO of consulting firm Amaltas, spoke via videoconference from New Delhi, India, while Nepal’s first openly gay elected official, Sunil Babu Pant, dialed in from Kathmandu.

Pant told the story of how he built a grassroots movement of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people in Nepal, beginning in 2001. A turning point was in 2007, when the Supreme Court ruled that gay and transgendered people “are natural” and mandated certain benefits and an end to discriminatory laws.

Today, the country is drafting a new constitution, and Pant said that if passed, it will be one of the most progressive in the world with regard to the rights of sexual and gender minorities. “We had to educate people to feel pride,” he said.

World Bank South Asia Regional Vice President Isabel Guerrero chaired the event, which was organized by GLOBE, the LGBT staff association of the Bank, as part of the Bank’s Diversity Month. Other participants included Mariam Claeson and Kees Kostermans of the Bank.

Pant said definitions of gender and sexual minorities differ from those in the West. A term commonly used in South Asia is “third gender,” a concept that has deep roots in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Today, Nepalis can obtain national ID cards that say “third gender” instead of male or female.

Another participant from India, lawyer Aditya Bondhopadhyay, talked about the ways anti-gay prejudice in South Asia is related to gender inequality. “Discrimination and violence here in South Asia is gendered. It is more about gender than sexuality,” he said, explaining that because males are traditionally more valued in South Asian societies, anyone who puts himself in a female role risks reprisal. He said concepts of collective honor and shame play into the shunning and violence that many LGBT people experience in South Asia.

As a result, he said, one study found a 70 percent school dropout rate for transgendered youth, affecting their ability to earn a living and driving many into dangerous sex work.

That led Guerrero and other panelists to ponder the ways the World Bank can become more involved with LGBT issues, as a convener, a knowledge sharer, and a compiler of data. Already, Pant’s group, the Blue Diamond Society, has won a World Bank Development Marketplace competition for a project that reduced HIV-related stigma and discrimination through a transgender beauty contest.

Mariam Claeson talked about how the Bank has been able to map the MSM (men who have sex with men) population for HIV prevention using community-based surveyors. Even in closed societies such as Afghanistan and the Maldives, she said, they have been able to obtain an accurate picture of the size and location of the communities.

GLOBE President Fabrice Houdart said there is still a perception in some quarters that “LGBT issues are Western issues and not relevant to our clients.” Wednesday’s panel was a first step toward dispelling that perception.

For an event video: http://go.worldbank.org/FV54WDYAX0
For more on GLOBE: http://go.worldbank.org/TW31Y4GO20
At the Accessibility Fair, held March 20 in the Bank Group’s MC-Atrium, staff and managers learned more about the resources available to people with disabilities, whether long-term or short-term.

Booths included representatives from the Bank Group’s Office of Diversity Programs, Ergonomics, the Disability Accommodation Fund, GSD, Disability & Development, Assistive Technology, and Supplier Diversity.

“We at the Bank Group think of people with disabilities in terms of what we can do, not what we can’t,” said Accessibility Consultant Terri Youngblood, who was greeting passersby at the Diversity Office booth. “People should really check out the online Disability Toolkit, which is a one-stop shop that houses all the resources available for staff with disabilities, injuries, illnesses, or need some sort of accommodation so they can continue working productively.”

Over at the Disability & Development booth, Karen Peffley was explaining the many links between disability and development: “Our team works with team leaders to integrate disability into projects,” said Peffley, who is an operations analyst on Sashka Posarac’s team. “In addition to social protection, safety nets, labor, and pensions, we get a lot of take-up from transport and education.”

The first report of its kind, a WHO World Report on Disability has been launched in 30 countries and is helping operationalize disability in development projects. In the report’s Foreword, Professor Stephen Hawking writes, “this report makes a major contribution to our understanding of disability and its impacts on individuals and society. It highlights the different barriers that people with disabilities face ... Addressing these barriers is within our reach.”

Nearby, at the Supplier Diversity booth, Karen Austin was busy sharing how the Bank Group works to encourage task team leaders and other individuals to do the extra due diligence to find diverse sources of supply. “We encourage them to find sources of supply that may be minorities, women, or disabled-owned business enterprises,” said Austin, who is a contracts officer for Corporate Procurement. “The end result is promoting economic development and inclusion in areas that have traditionally been overlooked.”

Perhaps the busiest booth of all was manned by Ergonomics Team Leader Leo Malca and Occupational Health Analyst Sophia Woldemicael. “Most of the time, people who come to see us have pain in their neck, back, or wrists,” explained Woldemicael. Her team offers a free service during which a consultant will conduct an assessment of how staff sit, and the position of their chair, desk, and monitor.

Marie Oben, in IMT’s Office of Assistive Technology, works hand in hand. “First, Leo’s team does the assessment, and then we provide solutions in terms of ergonomic keyboards and mice, sit-stand tables, or even magnification software for people who have problems seeing, or speech recognition software for those who need it.”

Very often, the Disability Accommodation Fund (DAF) will cover relevant expenses, not only for staff with long-term illnesses, but also for short-term injuries, like a broken leg. “We have many solutions,” explained Saroja Moses, Program Assistant in HSD. “If somebody is wheelchair-bound, DAF will pay for a personal assistant to travel with them on mission.”

If a staff member can’t drive or take public transport to work because of an injury, DAF will likely pick up the tab for a taxi. “Everything is work-based. We don’t pay for things that improve your home life. But every expense from an ergonomic chair and Sit-Stand Table to the means to arrive at work—DAF is there to support that.”

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