

Public Disclosure Authorized

THE WORLD BANK GROUP ARCHIVES

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH

RAM CHOPRA

Interview By: John Heath

Washington, D.C.

November 3, 2016

(Transcribed from a digital sound recording)

Public Disclosure Authorized

The following is a transcript of an interview conducted for a special oral history project on the McNamara years. The project, led by John Heath from 2016-2018, was a partnership between the 1818 Society and the World Bank Group Archives to capture a social history of the experiences of staff during President Robert S. McNamara's tenure (1968-1981).

This oral history transcript is a verbatim expression of the views, memories and opinions of the interviewee and it does not represent the policy or official history of the World Bank Group. The World Bank Group Archives makes no claim of accuracy or accurate transcription. The transcript presented here is for reference purposes only.

INTERVIEW

HEATH: It's Thursday, November 3, 2016. This is the World Bank Group archives in Washington, D.C. On behalf of the special oral history project on the McNamara years, I'm John Heath. This is the fifth of our interviews in the series, and today I'm very happy to be interviewing former World Bank Director, Ram Chopra who was a World Bank staff member from 1969 to 1996. Ram, I wonder if we might start with how you came to apply for the Bank? What led you – at what point did it enter your radar screen, so to speak?

CHOPRA: Well, I was studying at university in England at Oxford. I had a friend who was teaching at Oxford, and then came to the Bank for a few years, and then headed back to Oxford.

HEATH: What was his name, sorry, his or her?

CHOPRA: Sanjay Lall.

HEATH: Sanjay Lall, yes, okay.

CHOPRA: He was a professor at Oxford in economics. He sort of steered me towards the Bank, and I applied for the YP program [Young Professionals Program] in 1968 or whatever.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: That's how it happened.

HEATH: What impression did you have of the Bank before you joined it? I mean, had it really figured bulk large in your imagination, or not really so much?

CHOPRA: Not much till he described it to me. He had largely positive, but somewhat mixed

report on the Bank. I came thinking I'd try it out for three years and liked it and stayed almost my whole career.

HEATH: Right. Can you remember the sort of reservations that Professor Lall might have had?

CHOPRA: Well, the main one was that he is more of an academic bent than I was. He told me that as an academic, it wasn't the best place to be. It was more of an operational institution in his mind, probably correctly stated, and that at that point, the research, economic research, arm of the Bank wasn't that hot, so he went back to university and that was the main.

HEATH: Do you remember at that time when you joined who was in charge of economic research in the Bank? Was it a chap called [Irving] Friedman, I can't remember now.

CHOPRA: Hollis came shortly after I came. I honestly don't remember, actually.

HEATH: Right, right. How about the selection process, the interview for the YP program? What do you know, what do you recollect of that? The sort of questions they asked you, who interviewed you, these sorts of things?

CHOPRA: I was interviewed first in Oxford by a chap called Jim Dick from, I'd have to stretch my memory here, from human resources at that point. Then the subsequent interview was in Paris with a panel. Who was on it? I think Yves Rovani is the main one I remember.

HEATH: Right. Subsequently of OED [Operation Evaluation Department], of course, like yourself.

CHOPRA: Right. Oh gosh, it could be the person who was at the Paris office at that time, which I can't remember.

HEATH: Right. Do you have any recollection of the sort of questions they asked, the probing questions they put to you in the interview?

CHOPRA: I thought it was very relaxed interview, as I remember it.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: You know, made me feel relaxed to talk about myself and what I thought. It wasn't very hard, deep, probing questions.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: It was very relaxed chat.

HEATH: Right. Did they ask you anything, for example, about your understanding of project appraisal techniques, that sort of thing?

CHOPRA: A little bit of that. A little bit of my economics background, which is what I was mainly studying at that point. But as I say, nothing very pushing.

HEATH: Okay. What do you remember about your first day on the job when you arrived at the Bank?

CHOPRA: Whirlwind of running around offices, to go and sign various papers, talk to various people.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: Fortunately, what I remember is that I happened to be right next to a guy who subsequently became my -- I had met him for the first time that day. We went around together and became very good friends after. As we went through corridors, I met a few friends that I knew from before anyway, so that was quite pleasant.

HEATH: These were people you had met in Oxford or in England or in India perhaps.

CHOPRA: Or India, both, both.

HEATH: Yeah. And so, your first rotation in the YP, where was that?

CHOPRA: My first rotation was in the transport department. I also did my project stint there for six months. Within three weeks of joining, I was shuttled off to go with the team to Iran and Fiji. Around the world first class for a stinking student from Oxford. The striking thing was in those days that I went with a senior person on the transport economic side to Iran first for a couple of weeks, and he said, this is your in the field training. From here, you're going to Fiji, you're in charge of the economic pre-appraisal. That's it.

HEATH: Right, I see.

CHOPRA: So, I had three weeks training here with how the Bank does things. A couple of weeks in Iran, and off I was on my own with the mission leader.

HEATH: Right, right. Do you remember if there were any women professionals on that mission, or was it all men?

CHOPRA: On that particular mission; I don't think there were any women on that particular mission.

HEATH: Right, okay. So, let's talk a bit about your general perceptions of the McNamara period. We're going to talk first a bit about personalities, then moving on the issues, and then finally the culture of the time. Did you actually meet McNamara himself, either during his tenure or subsequently?

CHOPRA: A number of times. Fortunately, into the early part of my career, when I was the program division chief for Yugoslavia, we took him to Yugoslavia to spend three, four days. It was a very small group of us, the vice president and two of us in addition, so there were three total with McNamara.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: So, we got to know him actually quite well at that time.

HEATH: Could you tell me what period that was?

CHOPRA: That would have been the early '80s.

HEATH: Right. So, towards the very end of his tenure, in other words.

CHOPRA: Yes, yes.

HEATH: What impression did you have of him?

CHOPRA: Very smart, very quick, surprisingly shy, which I did not expect. Very much with the substance of things. He had obviously read his stuff, the briefing material, absorbed it, asked good questions, and just seemed to be on the ball.

HEATH: Would you say he was an approachable person, or did his shyness, perhaps, make him appear at least as somebody who was hard to get close to?

CHOPRA: It came across to begin with, not knowing that it was shyness, that it may be difficult to get to know him on that trip. But I think after the first evening, I decided that it was shyness, and the right thing to do was to take the initiative. So I did, and he welcomed it, and was very open when you did get through.

So, it was shyness; which is surprising for a man of his caliber and situation. I don't know if others have told you that, but when you're spending three days with him, you get to know the personality, how he is in the evening after work. He had no interest in going out to social occasions. He would rather tell us, we had organized, we were the junior guys on the team. The division chiefs organized this program and he kept saying, can you not cut down on all this

evening stuff, and just sit together and take it easy and relax.

HEATH: Right, sure.

CHOPRA: He was shy, retiring in that way.

HEATH: Of course, he always used to travel economy, yes?

CHOPRA: Yes, he did.

HEATH: So, you were traveling in business and he was in economy?

CHOPRA: No, I think we also did the same thing.

HEATH: I see. It would have been rude to do it otherwise. Any particular anecdotes you remember from that occasion, or any other occasions, which shed some light on what he was like as a person?

CHOPRA: Well, the anecdotes which I described, a social anecdote.

HEATH: Right, yes.

CHOPRA: The shyness thing, that kind of sticks in my mind very strongly. The other thing that sticks in my mind is the way he conducted his discussions with the top management of the country. I found it very impressive. I am a great fan of McNamara, let me tell you that will come through this thing, I might as well say it up front. In my book, despite all the reservations we can get into in a minute. Overall, I would say there never was another president as good as him, and I missed him afterward.

HEATH: Right. Did you ever see the film, *The Fog of War*?

CHOPRA: Yes, I think so. Yeah, I think I did some time ago, yes.

HEATH: He made that in the early 2000s, I think it was.

CHOPRA: Right, I did see that, yes.

HEATH: It was mainly, of course, reflecting on his Vietnam experience.

CHOPRA: Correct.

HEATH: I must say, I found a quality of evasiveness about, somehow. On the one hand, he clearly wanted to, you know, open up; somehow atone maybe, but he didn't go all the way somehow.

CHOPRA: I agree with that, I agree with that. He was very reticent. We tried to engage him in Yugoslavia on that subject, and he didn't say very much. On that score, he was very private. But one got the sense that he felt that coming to the Bank was doing something for him to get over that. He clearly had reservations about what happened, what he did, but he wasn't willing to openly talk about them.

HEATH: Right. We'll come on a bit later to talk about the substance, the issues of his period. But let's stick with the personalities for the moment. Which other people left an impression on you in the 1970s, would you say?

CHOPRA: You're not talking about the presidents, you're talking about staff?

HEATH: No, the staff.

CHOPRA: The management.

HEATH: People who were particularly influential in your --

CHOPRA: In the '70s?

HEATH: Yeah, in the '70s. Under McNamara.

CHOPRA: Munir Benjenk was the vice president of MENA [Middle East North Africa Region], I think in the '70s. Yes, he was the guy.

HEATH: What nationality was he?

CHOPRA: Turkish.

HEATH: Turkish.

CHOPRA: He left a good impression on me. He and I got along very well. The greatest compliment I remember from him was not what I was doing, or how my reports or analysis were or whatever. When we finished some important conversation we were having, he said, you know, Ram, I have to tell you something. I said, what's that? He said, I find you a young man of great common sense, which is very uncommon. That kind of remark sticks with me from that time, but I liked working with him.

HEATH: Did you have any dealings with Hollis Chenery or Ernie Stern, for example?

CHOPRA: Both of them, yes.

HEATH: Tell us something about them.

CHOPRA: Ernie Stern was capable, or as capable as he thought he was. A bit too self-aware of his greatness, but he was very good. He was clearly the smartest guy in the management team in my book. He knew his stuff, understood the bureaucracy. Knew how to push the buttons. I liked his overall agenda, the changes that he made. The only question was his, thinking of himself as being very good. Not being that understanding of lesser mortals. So, he could be a bit rough.

HEATH: Do you think his philosophy of development was the same of that as McNamara, or was he very different?

CHOPRA: In one fundamental respect, he was trying to develop, and I think expand or change, on what McNamara was trying to do. McNamara was very much about a) increasing the scale of the institution, b) introduce greater professionalism in every aspect of the institution, 3) with significant focus on poverty and development issues, and 4) his chosen vehicle was more project oriented than program oriented. But program, when I say program, I mean non-project rather than the overall program.

Stern incorporated all of that in his thinking, but he was very much also wanting to steer the institution towards the non-project, on the basic premise that unless you have an overall sound system, good projects won't lead to the best results.

HEATH: So, could you say that he was more in tune with the subsequent agenda of structural adjustment maybe than McNamara, initially at least?

CHOPRA: Ernie Stern was the author of the structural adjustment program; so it's not a subsequent program, he was it.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: So, definitely much more than McNamara on that score.

HEATH: Right, so even earlier in the early '70s, he was emphasizing the importance of getting the policies right.

CHOPRA: Yeah. But, you know, he did not flower to push the structured adjustment program till McNamara had left.

HEATH: Right, right.

CHOPRA: I mean, he was thinking about these things, but I don't think he was given that sway to change the institution to the significant extent he did change. Rightly, wrongly, plusses, minuses; we can discuss, but they did change.

HEATH: Okay, fine. Any other big personalities that left a mark on you?

CHOPRA: Seventies only now, or later?

HEATH: Yeah, we're talking about the '70s. Under the McNamara tenure, yeah.

CHOPRA: Atilla Karaosmanoğlu did you recall him?

HEATH: The name, yes.

CHOPRA: He was also a Turk, an economist. At the time in the '70s we are talking about, he was a senior economist, became then the chief economist for the Middle East Region. Ultimately became one of the three managing directors. He was a great influence on me. I liked the style with which he ran his missions, economic work, and the region's economic work and so on. How he related to people and his thoughtfulness and how he handled a situation. So, he was a good influence on me.

In the '70s still; Hollis was already there. I got to know him a little bit, but I did not transfer to become assistant director in the economics department until '80s. I think, mid-80s', something like that.

HEATH: What was Chenery like as a person?

CHOPRA: Also, shy. Very good in his economic field. Not very good at dealing with the rest of the operational part of the institution. He was a bit -- not adapt to that. And if I recall, Ernie Stern became his deputy, fairly early on, and he very much relied on Ernie to deal with that. So, that's the kind of strong first impression I had of him, obviously.

HEATH: Yeah, I see. When you joined the Bank, did you, I mean, you described how you went on this first mission, and you were essentially given three weeks briefing or whatever. Did you get any serious mentoring at any stage in the '70s, or were you left entirely to your own devices?

CHOPRA: Well, mentoring was with colleagues you were working with. There was no formal mentoring at all.

HEATH: Right, right, okay.

CHOPRA: So, if you were lucky enough to get on well, and you came across as wanting to learn, you got it.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: If you didn't, if you were a little bit of an arrogant fellow.

HEATH: Right. Because sometimes people say that, what's missing in the Bank of today is that there is no mentoring system, and in the old days there used to be, and people used to go on mission with more senior people. Perhaps from what you're saying, that wasn't true.

CHOPRA: No, no, it was true, that was the mechanism; but it was not formally --.

HEATH: I mean a budget commitment that's involved in sending two people instead of one person is a fairly formal commitment, isn't it, on a mission, for example.

CHOPRA: Well, as I told you in that formal sense, it was very brief for me.

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: But that was only a six-month assignment, so you obviously don't expect much.

After I had finished my second YP assignment and became a regular staff member, then obviously all missions you were going with had a lot of people. Senior people were running it and so on. There were always two or three senior people in each mission of six, seven, eight people.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: In that sense, yes. But to the extent you were doing a particular role; which year did you join?

HEATH: Much later. 1990. (Laughter)

CHOPRA: So, you have no direct experience with him, okay.

HEATH: No experience, no.

CHOPRA: If you were, let's say the transport economist on this mission, or the oil person or whatever, and you were relatively junior, between you and the mission chief there was nobody who was mentoring you. The mission chief would mentor you only in a non-technical sense, because you can't expect them to know all the specialties on the mission. So, whether you call that formal or not, I --

HEATH: Yeah, I see.

CHOPRA: I think it's a bit exaggerated to say that there was a formal commitment, except in the very beginning when you started.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: Beyond that, there was no formal commitment. It happened depending upon who you happened to be working with. It is better or worse dependent on that.

HEATH: Right. Leaving aside mentoring, was there -- do you remember training as being significant in particular? I mean, did you go on a leadership training course any time in the 1970s, for example?

CHOPRA: I went to lots of them. Whether they were in the '70s or '80s, I honestly cannot remember (both laughing).

HEATH: Did they ask you about your, or did they test you for your Myers Briggs personality?

CHOPRA: Yes, all that was done. Yes, yes all that happened. Yes, that did happen in the '70s, correct.

HEATH: Right, yeah.

CHOPRA: They did all that.

HEATH: Do you remember what four letter acronym you were given?

CHOPRA: I was judged to be unusual, in the sense that both my E's and I's were large. I was both an extrovert comparatively high amongst my peers, and comparatively introvert with my peers at the same time.

HEATH: All right, the same time, I see.

CHOPRA: Same time. What was the acronym, I can't remember that.

HEATH: INTJ?

CHOPRA: Yeah, INTJ I think.

HEATH: Standard type.

CHOPRA: Yeah, I think that is correct.

HEATH: All right.

CHOPRA: What strikes me; what I remember was that both the E and I came out. So, whether it is INTJ or it was ENTJ, which was dominant, I can't remember. I think I was the dominant one.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: The funny thing was they said, there are very few I's who have this extent of E. You're almost in the margin of being an ENTJ, which was interesting.

HEATH: Do you remember on that, you went to -- was this a residential event?

CHOPRA: Both.

HEATH: Both. In house and outside.

CHOPRA: Yeah. Again, (inaudible).

HEATH: And again, we're talking about the '70s, were there many women professionals, or are they all men at this time?

CHOPRA: No, there were a few women, but not many.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: In the '70s a number of trips I went on had some women but few, very few.

HEATH: Right. Finally, on the personality issue; were there any women in that time that left a mark on you professionally?

CHOPRA: I don't recall in the '70s that there were many --

HEATH: I guess there weren't many in senior positions.

CHOPRA: -- in senior positions.

HEATH: Right, exactly.

CHOPRA: That's what I was trying to think before answering. As colleagues, you know, we got on.

HEATH: Sure.

CHOPRA: And related well, but since I can't recall having been managed by a woman, or somebody being senior, no. So the answer is no, in the 70s.

HEATH: Right, right, okay. Let's move on to the issues now, the substance. I'm going to ask you first of all to tell me what you remember as the main principles of the McNamara years. I mean, in terms of what McNamara's philosophy of development was, and then how your own philosophy of development coincided or diverged from the McNamara agenda. Let's start with your perception of what for him were the main priorities.

CHOPRA: I think I partly went into that earlier in some question you asked. In a very aggressive growth agenda on the lending side, detailed management of processes, budgets. More project than non-project oriented.

HEATH: If we think particularly about the issue of growth versus redistribution.

CHOPRA: Well, he obviously believed in growth like everybody else at the time. But he simultaneously was very conscious of the poverty agenda. Very strongly so, and that he pushed pretty hard. What else on the aggregate side. As I said, stickler for detail. Very much wanting

to know both the bigger picture and the small picture. Absorption capacity was phenomenal; what he could retain and get very quickly. Very sharp mind. What else, I think that's about it.

HEATH: I was thinking more in terms of his approach to economic development. Maybe you can say how when you arrived from Oxford, I mean, you obviously had a certain view of how economic development should go, and to what extent was it in line with the emerging thinking in the Bank. Other major points of divergence that you remember between your way of conceiving development and what the Bank was telling you?

CHOPRA: Not really. The only thing that I said, he certainly wasn't from that sort of background of macroeconomics.

HEATH: Right. I should have asked you, was your -- you essentially were a macroeconomist, rather than a project economist?

CHOPRA: Well, during training I did economics. You know, I did a post-graduate too, so I did a little bit of both, yeah.

HEATH: Right, I see.

CHOPRA: So, I had a prolonged exposure to economics.

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: I studied in Delhi, then came to Oxford.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: So, a bit of both, but more macro than project.

HEATH: Right, yes.

CHOPRA: I don't recall him forcefully articulating particular points of view on macro issues. He was really comfortable in talking to people about them, absorbing what they had to say. He wasn't leading the agenda on that view like Stern.

HEATH: I see, okay.

CHOPRA: So, I don't recall any kind of, say, what is he saying, I don't agree with that; or wow, he's really getting to me on this on the macroeconomic side, because he wasn't that kind of person.

HEATH: No. But I mean, in terms of economic thinking, he very much emphasized, I think he explicitly rejected the idea of trickle down. And he talked about the need to reduce absolute poverty. I think he was the --

CHOPRA: Oh, oh that's what you're talking about. Yes, yes, yes, absolutely right. Yes, absolutely right. He was in line with what I thought.

HEATH: And that's -- you arrived at the Bank with the same conviction yourself.

CHOPRA: Right.

HEATH: Same thinking. Okay, I see. Of course, the other dimension of this was that, I suppose in those days there was much more faith in the state as a, as if you like, the driving force of development relative to the market. Did you, maybe out of your Indian background, did you come with that same conviction yourself or?

CHOPRA: Yeah, I think in the beginning, particularly in my Delhi days as a student, I was very much of that view. Coming through Oxford and the beginning days of the Bank, I was beginning to get much more conscious of the limitations of the state model, and the need for the private sector, the need for incentives, et cetera, et cetera.

So by the time I came through Oxford and came to the Bank, I was very much changed from where I had started out in India. The system here, at that point, was still probably a little more state oriented. I think McNamara was probably ahead on that one. I'm now correcting what I said earlier. I think McNamara was a bit ahead of that, compared to some of the senior people who were the old school. I remember some of the chief economists at that time would come through the old British colonial background, and they were very much kind of the old school.

HEATH: Can you think of names of people in that, or is that --

CHOPRA: Oh Gosh. I suppose one does not want to be quoted on these things.

HEATH: No, don't worry.

CHOPRA: Tommy Thompson, delightful guy. Very much the old, colonial, English, Africa experience, you know.

HEATH: Right. So, when it came to, let's say his thinking about economic development, how would you characterize it? Perhaps he didn't think much about it, I don't know.

CHOPRA: No, no, he did, he did. But, it was very much, looking at the government. Didn't spend much time on what was happening in the private sector, for example.

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: Didn't get that involved with the trickle down versus other sort of models. It's a set in their ways, very nice, perfectly gentlemanly to deal with, and so on.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: But limited in that sense. In that sense, McNamara was pushing. And you're absolutely right. He was challenging the trickle down quite forcefully. I thought I had said it in

terms of the poverty orientation, we went at that, but it's right to put it in those terms, yeah.

HEATH: Of course, the other big shift that's associated with him is moved to look at, in particular, rural development following the Nairobi speech, the annual meetings of 1973.

CHOPRA: Right.

HEATH: What recollections do you have of that orientation in the Bank in the '70s?

CHOPRA: I think we as younger people were quite excited by that and bought into it. Coming from India, that made a lot of sense to me at that time.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: So yeah, that's part of the reason why I'm very supportive of what he was doing.

HEATH: You were an economist from '70 to '73. What part of the Bank were you in at that stage?

CHOPRA: At that stage, I was in MENA, Middle Eastern North Africa.

HEATH: Right. And were you --

CHOPRA: -- and eastern Europe, sorry.

HEATH: -- in a particular sector, or were you working in a macroeconomic role?

CHOPRA: I was working in the program division. What was called the program division, which had mainly macroeconomists and loan officers. The project department was separate. Then I moved to become the senior economist of the department.

HEATH: Still in MENA?

CHOPRA: Still in the program --.

HEATH: Right, I see. All right, let's just go back to the earlier, when you --

CHOPRA: Then at that stage, and maybe just recall something, because it had Europe in it too.

HEATH: Yes, right. It was called EMENA.

CHOPRA: EMENA, EMENA.

HEATH: As opposed to ENMENA.

CHOPRA: EMENA is right.

HEATH: Right, right, sure.

CHOPRA: Yeah, I was at EMENA at that stage. I did some work in the Middle East, I did some work in European countries. I went to Greece at that point. But all that was as a macroeconomist in the early days.

HEATH: All right. So, when you had this position as an economist from '70 to '73, in the middle of that there was the reorganization of '72. Do you have any recollections of what that was all about, what impact it had? Or am I being unfair in expecting --

CHOPRA: No, no, I'm smiling because there have been so many reorganizations.

HEATH: Yes, of course.

CHOPRA: I really can't remember much about which one was which, because it went back and forth on the same issue. I'm basically not very pro these major reorganizations. And I really honestly can't -- I think in his case, he was trying to separate and emphasize the project side a bit

more, if I recall. Giving more importance to the project side then the macro side. But I really can't, you know, because it's all mixed up in my mind, about five of these reorganizations. All of them, I'm going like a yo-yo on the same themes.

HEATH: Well, if you look at the various histories, some of them say that essentially his '72 reorganization was in a sense, a forerunner of the subsequent ones in '87 and '96, insofar as it shifted the balance between the project side and the area side.

CHOPRA: That's what I remember and just said. That much I recall.

HEATH: I think the idea was that it tilted influence away from the projects, the central projects in particular, towards the regions and the countries, rather than say -- It was actually, to some extent, an undermining of the power of the project staff. That's what --

CHOPRA: Well, we can discuss that.

HEATH: Right. Well, I'd like to hear if you feel differently.

CHOPRA: Yeah. Now that you're jogging my memory about the specifics of that. The larger level issue, as I recall McNamara pushing, is to get more focus of senior management on projects involving the macro stuff. So, in that sense it's not destroying at all the ---

HEATH: I understand, right.

CHOPRA: The rest of the issue is the issue of boxes.

HEATH: Right, yes. And who controls the budget, for example?

CHOPRA: Exactly. But that's a boxes of center versus regionalized.

HEATH: Yes, yes.

CHOPRA: That to me is not the same thing as I hear people say this, now that you're jogging my memory it's coming back. I totally disagreed with the form that project staff were being undermined. In my view, they were being given more importance as a group.

Now the second issue is how you, in the microcosm of boxes and how you run the institution, and where the power lies, where the budget lies; that's a separate issue. A very important issue but a second issue. So, I want to make absolutely clear where I'm coming from on that.

HEATH: Fair enough.

CHOPRA: That's precisely what I was trying to get across, of things going back and forth like a yo-yo on that issue of how you define the boxes.

At the end of the day, I can't get that excited about it. Because, whichever way you cut it, the institution is going to remain in some form of matrix management. Having lived through various reorganizations, one could see the plusses and minuses of either way you draw the boxes. I am not convinced in my mind that one way is superior to the others. Because we have shifted, right, over time, over various reorganizations. I don't think it can be convincingly demonstrated that one form is better than the other.

HEATH: Well let's approach it from another angle. I mean, one of the issues --

CHOPRA: Am I answering your question?

HEATH: No, you are. Yes, indeed please, yes. The issue of quantity versus quality. You said very clearly that, McNamara emphasized increasing the amount of lending and so forth. Some people expressed a concern that, in the old days, we would spend a lot of time developing projects. But now, McNamara has introduced these five-year plans. Programs for every country, and it's expected that there will be lots of lending. Some people might have been concerned that there was an erosion of the quality of the projects, because they were chasing, had to keep up with the targets, the lending targets. What was your perception of that whole issue?

CHOPRA: There was certainly a bit of that. The lending target dominance became a problem. I agree with that side of the critique. Having said that, I think it was overdone, because there was the other side of McNamara, which was such a stickler for detail, that everything he did emphasized quality, apart from the numbers. But the two to him didn't-- in his mind, both co-existed.

Now the personality; when he was pushing changes, I can think of specific things like budgets, strategy, and all that. He was asking for much more specific attention to detail on project management, on project quality, on budgeting. I think the critique is overdone. Partly a question of being pushed to do something that you were not used to doing before.

So, I take it with some grain of salt. I agree with the fundamental point that there was such a pressure from him on targets, that clearly some of the middle to senior managers were getting over affected by those numbers. But having talked to McNamara on that and other occasions, I think he was very quality conscious. He would be aghast at the idea that he was pushing people to forget quality.

HEATH: Do you think there was any tradeoff between project preparation and project supervision? Do you think supervision was neglected because people spent all their time wanting to take projects to the board?

CHOPRA: Correct. That is a correct observation, I agree with that. There was a shift that occurred in budget allocation.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: And supervision got less attention. Again, you have to be careful how much credit or blame you give to a president when it gets to that kind of tradeoff. What I am partly suggesting is that no question he's responsible for applying a lot of pressure on aggregate planning targets and all of that. But you could treat that as an emphasis on saying, don't just believe in things as they happen. Drive the results more; be more conscious of what you're

planning to do, where you're trying to go.

Whether you interpret that as an indication that you will be judged only on the number you produce, rather than the quality what you produce, it's where the break occurs. I am not sure at all in my mind that I agree with the extent to which he was being criticized for giving up quality. I criticize the managers for that. They take the easy way out.

HEATH: I understand, yeah. I mean, in defense of McNamara you might say well yes, he was the guy who set up OED.

CHOPRA: He's the guy who set up all of the budgeting controls, to make sure that money went where it was intended to go.

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: It was a much more conscious manner. The same he was doing in the Pentagon, the same thing -- that's his personality. I think what I'm trying to distinguish in him being rightly criticized for somewhat overemphasizing what I think is a good thing to emphasize. You need a louder institution; you need more funds to go out to developing countries. To sit and say I want to do the perfect project at such a minute scale is not the philosophy I agree with.

So, I support the increase in volume. I support the pressure on plans. The question is when you get to implementing it, what signals are you passing and how will they get interpreted. And that's where the problem is.

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: Okay, so I'm slightly modifying, if you'd like, the standard critique. In the aggregate I come out supporting him rather than his senior managers, who were criticizing him subsequently, or even then. That he was throwing away quality at the extent of numbers. They were taking the easy way out. Is that clear?

HEATH: It is clear, yes indeed.

CHOPRA: That may be quite not a standard view that you might have heard from the others.

HEATH: No, that's precisely why it's great to have you giving us your input. It's important to have all perspectives. Did you at any point appraise a project? Did you do the, you know, do the economic analysis required to get the project through and so forth? Or in your roles as a macroeconomist were you sort of beyond that?

CHOPRA: No, and certainly in my YP days, I was actually pre-appraising the appraising project. So, in that era I was doing that. After that, no I wouldn't have been allowed to appraise a project, because I was in the program side.

HEATH: Right, sure.

CHOPRA: You know, I was the program economist, and there was the projects department. So, I would have been an interloper if I did (laughter).

HEATH: Because the thing I wanted to ask you is this is a time when, if the Bank ever believed in a project appraisal, this was it. People like Little - Mirrlees and Price Gittinger and so forth, that came up with this whole methodology of shadow pricing and discounting. As an economist, what was your -- were you persuaded by the logic of that, or did you have your doubts?

CHOPRA: Let me go back to your question, because I didn't give you the full story. As a macroeconomist, and then particularly as a senior economist in the department, I would join appraisal missions. Partly to observe and partly to input on some of this other stuff you're talking about. I was involved with people in the central project department who were pushing this kind of change and project analysis and all that; so I was into that.

In that sense, I'm slightly correcting, because I gave you the narrow answer; no I wasn't allowed to actually be doing the project appraisal directly. But around the periphery and this

participation, both in the missions and in the discussion, yes, I was involved.

HEATH: Perhaps you were the guy who came up with the opportunity cost of capital for country; the threshold rate of return. Did you do that sort of thing?

CHOPRA: No, I did not.

HEATH: Okay. Because I'm always bemused; what is your recollection about what the threshold rate of return was in the countries you worked in? What percentage was it?

CHOPRA: I'm trying to think of the '70s now. Jog my memory, what the ranges would be?

HEATH: Well in 1990 when I joined, it was always, you know, either 10 percent or 12 percent.

CHOPRA: Right.

HEATH: Which these days would make no sense at all, given the low interest rates. But I often wondered where these numbers came from. They must have come from the macroeconomists in the Bank, the country economists. Why was it that all countries seemed to have the same --

CHOPRA: No, I don't think it came from the --

HEATH: No?

CHOPRA: That's why I'm finding it difficult to recall. It was not expected of the macroeconomists at that point. I think these numbers generated from the central departments.

HEATH: Right, okay.

CHOPRA: Between probably the economics complex, but more dominated by the thinkers and the central project departments. Hans Weiss and Armando Ray, I don't know if these names

mean anything to you.

HEATH: Yes, they do.

CHOPRA: Those were the guys that were running around thinking a lot about these things. That's why I was a little taken aback by your question, because I don't think the macroeconomists really got involved in that.

HEATH: Right. From what you're saying, it sounds as though it wasn't an issue with you. It didn't really strike you as --

CHOPRA: No, I just didn't think about it that much. What you expect, in a sense, didn't make any difference to how you ran a project or what you did. I'm not sure. The threshold level is a construct which I don't recall any time getting a situation and saying, Christ, why are you turning this project down, because it's 1 percent less than your threshold number or whatever. I don't recall any such instance, do you?

HEATH: No, no. No, I think that's the case. Did you have any thoughts, I mean, you went on these appraisal missions. Even if you didn't do the economic analysis directly, you had an input into it. What was your thinking about the legitimacy. did it make sense, the approach to project appraisal as advocated by people like Little - Mirrlees and Price Gittinger. Did you have strong feelings about that, or not really?

CHOPRA: No, I wasn't spending that much time on that aspect, because I was more macro. Fairly quickly, I moved to the operational side at some point. Part of the thing is that after spending a certain number of years as a macroeconomist, I then became a -- so I had flip flopped a lot in the institution. That's why I'm having difficulty kind of sorting out your questions. From an economist, I moved to become program division leader of Yugoslavia. My next job was going to the economics department, into the research side. Then I went to OED.

HEATH: Right, right.

CHOPRA: Then I came back to the region. Then I went to co-financing and project finance. Even jumping between research, economics, operations, and sort of project type work at the higher level, management level, when I'm dealing with project finance and co-financing issues and all that.

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: So, it's a bit difficult for me to recall the different boxes of the different time periods.

HEATH: I understand.

CHOPRA: I'm quite eclectic in my career.

HEATH: No, I understand. Let's think about the research bit. Do you remember what dates you were in research? I mean, you were a senior economist in '74 to '79.

CHOPRA: Did you print out a copy of the CV? Is it there? Did you bring it with you, no.

HEATH: I'm sorry, I didn't, no. You were division chief after senior economist.

CHOPRA: Yeah. I think it was.

HEATH: Was it before you went to OED, perhaps?

CHOPRA: Oh, much before.

HEATH: Much before, okay.

CHOPRA: I'm trying to put a date to the move to, let's see I came in '69. So, about '76 or so, I would have been a senior economist. About '79, so I probably became the division chief.

HEATH: Yes, '79 to '84 you were a division chief.

CHOPRA: Right.

HEATH: I wasn't quite clear what division you were chief of at that point.

CHOPRA: This was the division that had Yugoslavia as a main active country at that time.

HEATH: Okay, so that still wasn't research then.

CHOPRA: No, no; this is programs.

HEATH: Programs, yeah.

CHOPRA: They had a program division, and they had a project division. So, you had a program division chief and you had a project division chief.

HEATH: Okay. So, it sounds like you were in research after McNamara, sometimes in the '80s.

CHOPRA: Yeah, early '80s.

HEATH: Let's talk a bit about how the philosophy of economic development shifted between the '70s and the '80s. During and post McNamara. What's your perception of the changes in the approach, the priorities?

CHOPRA: The big shift was with the Hollis Chenery and Ernie Stern group talking about the macro becoming much more important in the institution, in lending terms, and in terms of managing relations at the aggregate level, between the World Bank and the country. That was the big shift. And that was entirely at that time.

A lot of us at that age group, my age group, I was still quite young, I was in my thirties, were

quite excited by it, because it rang a bell, a true bell. That unless you get the bigger picture fixed, your projects won't succeed.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: So, I was very much with it, and participated along with the structure of adjustment type operations. Now is that the shift you're asking me to comment on?

HEATH: Yes, exactly.

CHOPRA: I was very much with it, intellectually and practically. I was supportive of Stern's push. But again, this is my contrary nature. I was beginning to feel, even at that stage, that it was being misinterpreted in terms of extent, and what it was doing to the morale on the project staff side.

I am fairly confident in my mind if you asked Stern, he would be very conscious of project quality issues, because he was sitting on the loan committee and comments would come on project documents. It was amazing at the level of detail that it came, even on project quality issues.

Again, I think it is a bit of the management at this middle to senior levels underneath Stern that has to take part of the blame. His responsibility, I think, on causing that erosion on the project side is that he was promoting very fast young people, mostly coming out of the macroeconomics background. You probably caught some of that period when you joined, right?

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: You know, I can't remember exactly which year.

HEATH: Yeah, it was still around in 1990 when I joined, yeah.

CHOPRA: So, Stern was still there.

HEATH: Yeah.

CHOPRA: But by that stage a shift had occurred in a big way. By doing that, he's bringing in the senior, middle level management, you know, the director level is becoming more and more not people who have come out of the project side. People who are managing the country operations and the programs are younger. They are mostly macroeconomists, sitting one here, with little difference that I jumped around before I got there. So, I'd seen a lot more of the project side than the typical guy that he was promoting at that point.

HEATH: Yeah.

CHOPRA: So, there was an erosion.

HEATH: They used the word demoralization. The project staff were demoralized, is that right?

CHOPRA: To some extent, yeah. They'd say, you're telling me what projects we should do as the director? What do you know about it? You're making these choices in your allocation of budgets, and who gets -- how much agriculture gets and how much this gets. What do you know? There was a little bit of a demoralization and a strain there, and you could feel it. So, you just have to be very conscious.

To that extent, like McNamara, Stern also is responsible for overdoing this. Then, later in the '90s, the thing began to go back a little. People again became conscious that okay, you can't do only the macro. You can't only get the -- try to get the overall thing right; you also need to focus on the specifics of the project, the quality of the projects. You have to spend a lot of budget and money on that. You can't give up that much supervision, quality. All that's starting to come back as a backlash.

HEATH: Right. If we can shift to structural adjustment took place roughly, after the second oil

crisis, late '70s.

CHOPRA: Even later than that. You know, late '70s, you'd put a start to it.

HEATH: Right. Were you conscious then that maybe there was going to be less attention given to McNamara's poverty agenda then there had been, or was that not a tradeoff that you saw at the time?

CHOPRA: No, I didn't see that as a tradeoff in the beginning. See a lot of the poverty work also came out of the macro side. It was not only informing the project choices; it was informing the type of analysis that was being done. No, in the beginning, there didn't seem to be a real tradeoff that the McNamara poverty focus was getting less attention. Because Stern was very much the poverty focused guy also, in addition to his macro thing.

See, again as I say, people kind of remember, or even when they were there, took the signals unidirectionally much more than I was then inclined to do. Now when I recollect about it, I give credit to people for those unidirectional comments.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: Life was a little more shaded.

HEATH: Yes. You must have at times in the '70s, sat in on board meetings.

CHOPRA: Yes.

HEATH: What is your perception about how they were run?

CHOPRA: By the chair, or in general?

HEATH: When a project would be taken to the board for approval and the chairman. I mean,

McNamara was presumably in the room. He was calling the shots.

CHOPRA: Oh yeah.

HEATH: What was his style in terms of organizing the meeting, running the meeting?

CHOPRA: Very engaged. He would many times not just pass it on from a board member question, you answer project staff, or project director, or country director, or whatever you are. He would many times take the essence of the question, summarize it and point it, you answer. Very engaged, listening, and again showing a lot of consciousness of the quality issues.

HEATH: Again, to present another view, some people suggested that he had it all sewn up before he went into the room. That he knew exactly what decisions he wanted made, and that essentially it was a rubber stamping by that stage.

CHOPRA: Again, you know, I just have to almost laugh at these comments. The role of the board then, and at least until I was at the Bank in the late '90s, was rubber stamping. When was a project refused at the board? By the time it got to the board, the decision had been made. You were not expecting to make a decision on the project.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: So, what does this kind of comment mean? All you can say is that he sometimes is kind of, taking the -- in the way I described it, he's taking the question and slightly rephrasing it to suit the outcome that he's seeking. Or trying to avoid a certain kind of criticism being leveled on the project. The ultimate decision is made anyway. Nobody is going to change the design. Nobody is going to say yes or no at that stage. Come on.

HEATH: What perception did you have of the effectiveness of the board, I mean ultimately as a governance institution responsible for oversight. Did they play that role effectively in your view?

CHOPRA: By the time things got to the board level, I do not recall any significant time that a decision was being affected. What was important, which staff level people did not see which I became conscious of only somewhat when I became a division chief on the program side. But certainly, when I became a country director, I became conscious of, is the influence is taken much earlier.

I used to regularly meet with various directors, board directors, about what we were doing in the countries that they represent. Or other directors who were particularly interested in that country's project or structural adjustment or whatever, would call me in and we would discuss. That is when they were trying to influence. That's why I sort of dismissed this thing at the board meeting level; that it makes all that much difference.

HEATH: Right. But before the board meeting, you think possibly the board director, CD's [Country Directors], did have for a significant input? Or not really?

CHOPRA: Again, not on specific project design issue. The maximum they would go is because they had a larger view on the tradeoffs that we talked about earlier. What are you focusing on, are you doing more focus on poverty, more on governance, more on this, more on that? Then they would start commenting in the early stage, or even in the discussion with the board. That never sort of led to redesign at that point. Just getting it off their chest and putting it on the record.

HEATH: Right. Can you remember any cases where a project didn't make it to the board, because an executive director had firmly opposed it?

CHOPRA: Oh yeah, that's definitely; that sort of thing would happen in, where the -- not the project, but the aggregate country stance of the World Bank counted.

HEATH: Right, yes.

CHOPRA: Example: one of the countries that happened to become active in the period, four,

five-year period, when I was country director for the Middle East, Iran came into play. We consulted with board members as we started the relationship, obviously. So, I was directly involved in that as the director responsible for the opening of the relationship.

We had taken in a decision, that management had taken, not me but I went to ask senior management with whatever I could make. That at that point, Rafsanjani was then the president. That he was a moderate and he could make a difference, and he should be supported. But at the board level, there was disagreement. The U.S. in particular was not at all happy with the Bank --

HEATH: Was this -- at the time there was a coup, yeah, or rather the revolution in Iran.

CHOPRA: Yeah, this is the early '80s. It's post that time.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: [Akbar Hashemi] Rafsanjani came a few years into this. No, no; this is much later. We're talking about '90, '91. This is much later.

HEATH: Oh, I see, much later.

CHOPRA: Much later. This whole period of the '80s, the Bank and the West just ignored Iran.

HEATH: Yeah, right.

CHOPRA: At that point, when Rafsanjani came into power, and this was about '90, '91, thereabouts, we decided in consultation with most of the members of the board. The Europeans for it, the Americans were not.

HEATH: I see.

CHOPRA: So, there was considerable discussion and influence being sought by board members

at that time, very early on when we picked a project.

HEATH: Right, I see.

CHOPRA: Before it went to the appraisal, you know, they were into you.

HEATH: Right, right.

CHOPRA: Those are the kind of examples.

HEATH: I understand.

CHOPRA: I don't recall many instances where they said, Huh, this project is not designed very well or, you know, they might say don't you want to put a little more push on some aspect on the environment or poverty focus, or something. But not at the lower level than that.

HEATH: What was your general perception of the quality of the executive directors, in terms of intellectual engagement with the program of the Bank? Were they essentially --

CHOPRA: Very variable.

HEATH: Very variable, I see.

CHOPRA: I don't think in aggregate terms you needed the management or the staff at the Bank, were overawed by the excellence and the quality, intellectual quality of the board. You probably agree or disagree, I don't know.

HEATH: I'm just the interviewer.

CHOPRA: That's my view. No, no I mean from your own time. The people were not that sort of -- some board members were very good.

HEATH: Going back to your work in the Middle East. You were division chief from '79, I think, to it must have been about '84.

CHOPRA: Yeah, yeah, through '84. Then I went to the economics department.

HEATH: Let's talk about that time as a division chief at the tail end of the McNamara period. What was it like working on the Middle East in this period, in that time?

CHOPRA: Well, in that stage I was working exclusively the countries in there. There was no Middle Eastern country in that division.

HEATH: Okay, it was all Europe.

CHOPRA: It was all Europe, yeah.

HEATH: The Iran revolution and everything, presumably, which came in '79, I see.

CHOPRA: No, no, no there were divisions that had only Europe division (inaudible).

HEATH: Oh okay, I see. You were handling the European side.

CHOPRA: Yeah, I was doing mainly Yugoslavia at that time.

HEATH: Right, okay fine. So, this was before they -- the melt down of the 1980s in Yugoslavia and all that.

CHOPRA: Correct. [Josip Broz] Tito was still around when I started.

HEATH: Right, right. What do you recollect about relations with Yugoslavia at that time?

CHOPRA: Oh, they were amazingly good.

HEATH: Did the Bank have an office in Belgrade?

CHOPRA: There were very few offices at that stage anywhere.

HEATH: Right, right.

CHOPRA: No, the relationship was very good, and in my three or four years that I was there, you know McNamara came and spent a few days. Clausen came and spent a few days. So it got a lot of attention. Partly because in the beginning it was Tito. People admired the way he held the country together. They were just very good at it, in terms of relations at the Bank. They knew how to play the institution well.

Although it was a federal structure, it was actually a very, very devolved society. The states, the provinces, were very powerful. And to quote you, my first visit as the division chief to the country, I went to see the Minister of Finance in Yugoslavia. I started telling him, these are the issues that we need, I need to talk to you about and see what we can do about them. He said, thank you for informing me now. Please go to the capitol and discuss it with the provincial minister of finance. That's where you will get any movement, I can't help you very much. I can make a call or two but don't be fooled, the decisions are going to be made there, and that's where you have to influence him. As clean as that.

HEATH: Right, right. Changing the subject. Subsequently in your career in 1986 to 1990, you were director in OED. I'd like to ask you if OED was on your radar screen in any way in the 1970s. It was set up by McNamara in, I think it became a formal autonomous independent agency about 1973. Did you have any engagement with OED in the '70s, or any perceptions of the quality of their work?

CHOPRA: I had some interaction, because obviously reviewing stuff. But because the board had decided that the structure of OED, and this you'd know from your own time, was essentially exposed evaluation. The impact of OED was not very high in the '80s. It is partly, and I'll also begin to answer the question that you will ask me, why did I go to OED.

HEATH: I'd like you to go back to the '70s. Think about the '70s, long before you entered OED as a director.

CHOPRA: Yeah, yeah, I'm talking about that time. Some interaction, but not all that much. Did not make a huge impact, and I'm trying to explain why. But also, by hindsight, it's not that I was thinking about it in that time; it just did not figure it in my radar screen (inaudible) as a middle level manager at that point. It didn't make that much impact on my life.

HEATH: Do you remember having an opinion about the quality of their reports, for example? Perhaps not, I mean, I don't know.

CHOPRA: Not much, because one didn't get to interact that much as a manager. So, your staff had to deal with them (inaudible) on implementing projects or programs or whatever. At the management level, not all that much interaction occurred.

HEATH: Because apparently at some point, McNamara; I mean, it was amazing how the level of his engagement with the day to day work of the institution. He would actually lean on people to make sure that the project completion reports were, he would ask why aren't they being produced on time? Maybe as a manager, at some point, you were worried about --

CHOPRA: Yeah, yeah, the project completion report it was getting pressure from the top. I thought you were asking about the direct evaluations that the, not the regional staff, but what the OED did.

HEATH: Right, no sorry. Forgive me, I should have explained. I meant, because OED's role was to evaluate those self-assessments, as we call them.

CHOPRA: Yeah.

HEATH: Yeah, I mean sorry, I should have made it clear I was talking about the PCRs (Project Completion Report).

CHOPRA: Yeah, yeah. PCRs used to get a lot of pressure from the top. Staff thought it was a bore, most of them but particularly the project people, who thought it was a bit of a bore to have to do.

HEATH: What was your own view? Do you think it was a worthwhile to do?

CHOPRA: Yeah, it was worthwhile to do, and I would support that. I would support doing them. I had no problem with that. But I'm saying the structure of things was such that it needed a push, it didn't happen automatically. People would get enthused by doing that or worry too much about the quality of that.

Part of the reason, ex-post or even then, even when I was director, I used to get slightly taken aback if I had looked at annual reports, or country reports, of projects on the same country and the same sector over time. The conclusions about change needed were almost identical. I don't know whether you observed that in your time. Because by that stage, things are beginning to change. The short answer is PCRs yes, but other than that, the OED did not figure very strongly in my view.

HEATH: Right. They have two functions. One is accountability, the other is lesson learning.

CHOPRA: That's the lesson learning I'm talking about. It's amazing, even to this day, you probably find a high commonality. The high level of conclusions of what are the lessons.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: If those lessons obviously are not being learned, if you have to keep repeating them, by definition, that reduces the impact of the institution.

HEATH: Tell me how you came to work at OED. I know you said initially that it was -- perhaps you didn't, sorry. What view did you have of OED before you actually worked there, in terms of the quality of the staff, for example?

CHOPRA: Yeah, partly how I became aware of (inaudible).

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: The better way to answer that question is to tell you how I got persuaded to join. I'll actually fully answer that question. Yves Rovani called me when I was assistant director at the economics department. He called me; I'd been there four years. He says, and Jean Baneth, who was my director then and the French cabal was obviously working behind the scenes here. He says, I've been looking for a director with a particular profile, and your director suggested I talk to you.

He said, I'll tell you about the profile, but I want to ask you about your perceptions. I said, I am not sure why you are even thinking of me as a director here. I have less project experience than I think you should ideally be looking at for the OED. Two, I am not all that impressed by what is coming out of OED. Three, I don't see much movement of staff both ways. It's always a one-way deal. This was very true at that time. It's become less so now because we pushed very hard and we were working together.

How come you always get people towards the end of retirement to go there. You magnify the perception that this place is not going to have that much impact. Because these guys don't do back, they're not learning much out of here to go back and be valuable. So, he says that's exactly why Jean Baneth asked me to look at you.

He said, to be quite frank, I'm asking whether you will come, because I exactly want that to happen. We want to change the age profile, we want to change the experience profile, and I want to make sure that people will come from operations at the early part of their career and go back to operations. He said, I want you to come here because I think you have a good chance of becoming a country director, with your varied experience. That's what I want my directors to do; is to move. Be seen to move from here to operational management positions. Then I'll be established as an institution.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: I said, you are talking my language. Let's go, when do you want me to join? So, we both talked the same language.

HEATH: I see.

CHOPRA: Okay, so it was not anything on my radar screen to consider the job for me, because I didn't consider myself qualified for it. But he persuaded me that what is needed is not the detail. He says, you have enough project experience, you've had enough project exposure to know the quality of a project, to make comments on it. You don't have enough experience to go and run an appraisal mission, I see that, but that's not what I want. These are the things I'm looking for.

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: So, I said okay; makes sense. That's how that went down. We spent a long time, management time, between the two of us, changing the age profile and the skill profile.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: A lot of young people came, who then went back to operations, which is a critical thing we wanted to score.

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: If you wanted to have an impact on the place.

HEATH: I see, interesting.

CHOPRA: Then change, look at the substance of what we producing, why we were producing,

what kind of things. We started a program at that time which was not there before the evaluation. He was much more responsible for (inaudible), but I helped him on that evaluation capacity development program, trying to set it up in countries. Changing the profile, getting closer to the completion of a project, start our evaluations. Do more country level evaluations. All that kind of change that began to happen in that time.

I think it was positive, as far as I know. I'm not being just self-serving here. I think it was positive. The institution was giving us feedback that the interaction between OED and the operational side of the Bank had improved. There was more to and fro. There was more attention happening between, because both Yves and I would make a pest of ourselves talking to managers and operations, saying this is what's coming up, what are you doing about it, et cetera. We started opening up channels and both coming out of operations, you see.

HEATH: At the time you were there, there must have been a number of projects that were financed towards the end of the McNamara period, that were coming up for evaluation. Being completed, and PCRs were produced, and OED would validate them. Do you remember any second thoughts at that stage about the wisdom of the McNamara approach, based on these evaluations of the projects from that period?

CHOPRA: The question is, I'm trying to think slightly reinterpreting your question to compare.

HEATH: Right, yes.

CHOPRA: Did I notice any systematic bias of the PCRs from the McNamara years with the post McNamara years.

HEATH: Okay.

CHOPRA: I think that's the question you're asking, or that's the best way to try to answer it. I don't know how else I would answer it right off --

HEATH: I was thinking of-- you were there from '86 to '90. An average project in the Bank runs for about seven years. Many of the projects that would have come up for evaluation and would have influenced the studies that IEG [Independent Evaluation Group] was doing, would have originated at the end of the McNamara period. I wonder whether the evaluation of those projects led to a rethinking of the wisdom of the McNamara approach. The focus of those years. Was that an issue? Or perhaps you were already onto evaluating structural adjustment.

CHOPRA: No, no, no. There were a lot of PCRs that projects were focusing on. Nothing systematic. There was a lot of discussion on projects generally, both during the McNamara years and immediately after that, that would have gone into my four-year purview.

HEATH: Yes, right.

CHOPRA: There was a lot of discussion, criticism on whether the poverty focus had succeeded.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: Whether a good job was done, what the different things are to be done. But yeah, there were all that sort of discussion. What I can't think of, that means it didn't strike me as such, that there was a systematic kind of dominance of a certain type of criticism with McNamara and post McNamara period. Both of which would have gone through my desk at that point. I don't recall any systematic.

HEATH: Because I mean the philosophy of the Bank had changed. It was focusing on, get the state out, empower the private sector. This new thinking associating with the Thatcher, the Reagan, the Anne Krueger. Was that permeating OED?

CHOPRA: Yes, yes, now that you asked the question, the answer to that is yes. You were beginning to get that kind of discussion coming up in the reviews, and the meetings that were taking place on those reports and so on. That the change was happening, and that was a desirable thing that did not happen before. So, to answer the question, yes.

HEATH: Was Ted Rice there when you were there? He was a key -- perhaps he came after you.

CHOPRA: I know the name. I don't think we overlapped. We may have but I don't think so.

HEATH: Okay, right.

CHOPRA: I know the name, yeah. Why do you ask particularly?

HEATH: Well, because he was associated with a defense of the development bank, at a time when it was no longer fashionable. When, there was a famous report by Fred Levy in 1992, thereabouts, criticizing directed credit and subsidized credit and these sorts of things. I just wondered if there was any discussion of those issues when you were around.

CHOPRA: Little discussions were taking place.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: But I don't recall Ted Rice being there.

HEATH: Right, okay. I wonder if I might end our interview by asking you something about the culture of the Bank. Again, going back to the 1970s. Let's start by asking, did you belong to any clubs while you were in the Bank in the 1970s?

CHOPRA: What kind of clubs?

HEATH: Well, the Bank has various clubs, ranging from the stamp club.

CHOPRA: Oh, that sort of thing.

HEATH: That sort of thing, you know, societies.

CHOPRA: Staff Association, I became a member, one of the early members. I don't know if that is included in your question.

HEATH: Yes, indeed, it could be. What perception did you have of the Staff Association? Was it an effective body?

CHOPRA: Well, when I was working with it, it was just the beginning days. Actually, I was the first representative for EMENA (inaudible). I was right at the founding end of the association. I served in that capacity maybe a couple of years. It was the very early days. You were trying to find a way how to have an impact, how do you get management to listen to you, to start the whole process. So, it was very, very early days to form any real judgement of how far we got.

In my view, it was clearly needed, because there was no effective way of channeling that. It was a much more management dominated place at that time than it was subsequently. The staff views did not get through very much those days. So, it was definitely needed. The fact that we were beginning to get people to at least talk to you, and let you come and sit with management, give the staff view, was necessary and was obviously beginning to make some difference. But it was so early that one can't claim too much credit for what it could do at that time.

HEATH: Right. So, what you're saying suggests that, before that there really wasn't that much opportunity for staff to sit around the same table and raise the awkward questions with managers, is that right?

CHOPRA: Correct. It was very sort of top down atmosphere.

HEATH: Right, right. I wonder whether the issue of pressure from the U.S. Congress about World Bank salaries. Was that an issue at that time, do you remember, when you were working with the Staff Association?

CHOPRA: Oh, very much so. For a long time, it was an issue, yes.

HEATH: Any other extramural activities that you remember associated with Bank at that time? Any other clubs or societies you belong to?

CHOPRA: There weren't -- I don't think I joined any other sort of established clubs, like photography or this or that.

HEATH: You weren't a member of the 5:30 club?

CHOPRA: Yeah, 5:30 I did.

HEATH: What do you recollect of that?

CHOPRA: Well, it was fun. We used to meet, sit and chat. But we did, the reason I'm getting a little kind of fuzzy is because in addition to these established known clubs, some of us got like together, in groups of 10 or 12 around some theme.

HEATH: Yes, I see.

CHOPRA: You know. So, I did more of that than the formal --

HEATH: So, give me an example of some of the themes that you discussed in those days?

CHOPRA: Well, one obvious one was we'd get together as macro economists, 10, 12 of us would just decide from around the Bank, let's meet once a month or whatever. Sit and chat and talk about things. Another group was an investment club that we got together, 10 of us, actually investing in the stock market. A number of things came up along the way like that over my years. People would just decide it's good to sort of sit, and some groups are just no particular theme. We'll decide the theme just before the meeting or whatever.

So, I was more into that kind of smaller group thing other than the larger. Same thing now, I suppose it's my nature. For example, I play a lot of bridge. I will never join a Bank Fund bridge

club. But I will join a group of 10, 15, 20 people who play in their homes by rotation. The cold, larger institutional setup, where it's too serious, where you don't interact in a stronger more direct way in a smaller group. That smaller group -- by nature I'm that rather than that. No I can't give you much perspective on those clubs besides the Staff Association.

HEATH: What about Bretton Woods? Were you a member of Bretton Woods?

CHOPRA: No, I joined after I retired.

HEATH: Right, okay. How about life work balance? Maybe the concept didn't exist in those days in the 1970s. Was there an awareness of the need to not to work too hard? From the point of view of interest of your wife and your kids, perhaps. Did these issues arise?

CHOPRA: No, your work dominated. There wasn't a very good sense of work life balance. People just did -- went away for long periods on mission and worked fairly hard.

HEATH: Do you remember how many days typically somebody would go on mission? The average in those days, in the '70s?

CHOPRA: I would personally be going on three or four economic missions a year.

HEATH: And each mission would be what, two, three weeks?

CHOPRA: Three weeks.

HEATH: So, about 12 weeks a year, yeah. What was their norm about? You couldn't spend more than so many days a year on mission, and was it enforced?

CHOPRA: Nothing was enforced.

HEATH: Oh, okay all right.

CHOPRA: People did what they needed to do. The only time I remember raising an issue myself was the chap was going to lead a mission to Turkey. Since I had traveled to Turkey many times before, was insistent that I go, and my wife was expecting her first baby. And I said, I've never said no before but now I'm saying, I would have to be ordered to go. It's just too important for my wife. I had neglected it before, I'm not going to neglect her.

And he said, what about scheduling it after your expected date, I said or just before whatever, let's try and make a judgement and we can adjust the time. I said look, I can't tell you, within two weeks' time of that. So, they had to go to the director.

HEATH: So, it wasn't perceived to be an exceptional -- what you were doing was not the norm.

CHOPRA: No.

HEATH: I see.

CHOPRA: None of the -- he applied a lot of pressure on me, and was trying to tell me look, I write your evaluation. I said, I don't mind, you can do what you like. I've never said it in my whole career up till now, and my track record is good on that. I've been a good soldier, but here is one issue I'm going to stick on. And it had to go; the director called me and said well, he's complaining, can't you do something. He says okay, I agree with you, and he'll have to manage without you. But I had to make a fuss if that gives you an indication.

HEATH: No, it does, yes. I mean, among your colleagues and friends, were you aware that wives were sort of, making rightly, raising questions about the absence of their spouses. Was that an issue, did it come up in social --

CHOPRA: Absence of spouses of what?

HEATH: Well, in terms of being away too long on mission, that sort of thing.

CHOPRA: Yeah, yeah sure. It was an issue with everybody.

HEATH: But they just went along with it. They didn't sort of --

CHOPRA: They went along with it. The spouse points that was given was to take your wife on a mission once in a while, but that's so far in between. But they enjoyed it whenever they went. My wife enjoyed the two or three that she came one. She loved them.

HEATH: Right, okay.

CHOPRA: But it was very far. Family just had to take it. Even now when I talk about it actually, this kind of thing, because now we have grandchildren, and we see what happens to them when they travel themselves. We tell them my wife tells them. My older son was -- goes bananas when you go away for three weeks. I can't deal with him. Cost of the job.

HEATH: Sure. Do you have any sense about the divorce rate? Do you think it was higher relative to the general population, because of these pressures, or maybe you didn't have any sense of that?

CHOPRA: No, I didn't see too many divorces amongst our intimate crew that we dealt with. They all complained, but divorce didn't happen. I don't know objectively what the data is.

HEATH: Right, okay. Inside the Bank, relations between men and women, how did they change in starting in the '70s and bringing it to the present? What perceptions do you have about the nature of those --?

CHOPRA: Oh, it was a slow, slow but significant change for the better over time.

HEATH: When you were a division chief, would you ask your secretary to bring you coffee?

CHOPRA: I'm trying to remember now. It was the norm, particularly if you were the division

chief. Not as a staff member it was not a norm. For the division chief or director, it was the norm. But I remember -- I want to make sure I'm telling the truth here, whether it was division chief or director job.

On my first day, I called my secretary, who brought me coffee without my asking. And I said, I do not expect this as part of your job. I would appreciate it if you have coffee made in the front office so that anybody can help themselves and I'll help myself. And she said, well I'd like to make it for you, if that's okay. I said if you want to do it voluntarily that's fine, but it's not my expectation.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: But I cannot remember whether I said it as a division chief or a director. I can't remember.

HEATH: Can you remember at that time when you were a manager, did the issue of sexual harassment arise at all any time when you were a --

CHOPRA: Did I have to deal with any sexual harassment?

HEATH: I'm not suggesting that you were responsible.

CHOPRA: No, no, no. Did I have to deal with any direct cases?

HEATH: Yes, exactly.

CHOPRA: No, offhand I do not recall any direct cases happening around me. No, I can't --

HEATH: How about leaving aside the relation between the genders. I mean, --

CHOPRA: No, no I'm still thinking about your gender question. I remember one day when I

was a director, my secretary breaking down in a huge way, and I'm trying to recall whether that was a sexual harassment issue. No, it wasn't, now I remember. It was the vice president's secretary giving her hard time. It was not a sex issue.

HEATH: Well, that was my next question. I mean issues of bullying, whether it between men and men, or men and women. Was the Bank a tough place in that sense in terms of --

CHOPRA: There was a lot of, bullying is probably too strong a word. The boss-staff relationship, or the mission chief or division chief, my way or the highway kind of staff favoritism. I can remember at least one or two managers in my management jobs, division chief level, when I was director level and different assignments. I remember at least a couple division chiefs, where I got the sense from their staff that there was a huge amount of favoritism and managing by fear. So, that did exist; that did exist, and it did come to my attention.

HEATH: Right. So, for example, in a division meeting might there be occasions when the boss would single people out and criticize them in front of their peers? Was that common?

CHOPRA: That I would call a minor level infraction.

HEATH: Okay.

CHOPRA: Where it is more, I'm talking worse. When people did not feel comfortable enough to say what they thought was right, because of a fear of reprisal in some sense. So, stronger than what you are talking about. I can remember two manager cases that the rest knew so it was there.

HEATH: So, careers could suffer as a consequence of these policies of favoritism.

CHOPRA: Yeah. But it wasn't true of all the managers.

HEATH: No, I see.

CHOPRA: Dominantly no, but some were pretty strong. There wasn't actually much consciousness of not putting people down. The kind of case you're talking about, really common.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: In fact, actually, one of the things that I enjoyed doing post Bank was conflict management. When I was in the Middle East, I got into this thing between the Arabs and the Israelis. It was the peace process that had just broken out. One of the most fascinating periods I had. It stayed with me when I finished the Bank career, that I wish I had been properly trained for conflict management. So, that thought stuck with me.

When I had time, and I was wondering what are different things I want to do after it, it had nothing to do with the Bank. Conflict manager was one of those, and I needed to get trained, so I formally was trained. I came back to the Bank after having been in the advertised project by the Bank management, that they wanted to start conflict management seminars, classes, putting managers and staff together.

I happened to be working with a group that did a lot of training sessions like that. So, I said to the president of the group that I was working with at that time, why don't we bid on this? You have somebody from the Bank with a long experience, and maybe that will get you the job. So, we did and we won it.

I sat down and devised, scenarios, role playing all that. I came for a whole year, twice a month, and ran groups of 25 to 30 staff and managers for a whole day. They sat and we had role play sessions, and I lectured. Two of us used to come, one other person and myself. These groups, and we had these sessions, and they now have a mediation group formally established at the Bank. They continue running these sessions in house now because we, there I played more of a role than the other person did. So, I actually wrote all the role play sessions, and prepared all the sheets and instruction for running the course and outlined the course and so on.

HEATH: None of that existed in the Bank when you were there in the '70s or '80s?

CHOPRA: No. What had started at some point in the middle of my stay in the Bank were all these, what do you call them, appeals procedures and so on. Now they have a full-scale tribunal in the Bank.

HEATH: Yes.

CHOPRA: As it happened, my wife who is a lawyer, you met, I don't know whether she talked to you about that. She went and joined a law firm after she was teaching at a school. Mid-career, she became a lawyer. Somehow, by accident, had some people from the Bank come to her, to the firm to ask for help on some problem they were having with the institution. She started in that. She's now a specialist in that.

HEATH: Interesting.

CHOPRA: So, she represents staff in the Bank, Fund, IDD [Integrity Due Diligence], even the NIH [National Institutes of Health], and various institutions.

HEATH: Right. Now when you were at the Bank, did she have her own career, or she was a full-time mother and housewife or how was it?

CHOPRA: She was a teacher.

HEATH: Teacher.

CHOPRA: But she took five years break when we had the two children. She decided that's the way she wanted to do it.

HEATH: Where did you send your children to school?

CHOPRA: Where?

HEATH: Where?

CHOPRA: Both started at the Washington International School, and then (inaudible) moved to Maret.

HEATH: Right, I see. What do you remember about the Washington of the 1970s? First of all, where did you live at that time?

CHOPRA: Seventies, we started living in D.C. for two, three years, and then moved to Arlington because we wanted more space and couldn't afford it here. We lived there for 15 years in Arlington, and then moved back to D.C. because my wife was teaching at the International School and our kids were going there, so we moved back into D.C.

HEATH: When you think of the Washington of the 1970s, what comes to mind?

CHOPRA: Little village; backward place. Nothing to do culturally.

HEATH: Could you get decent bread anywhere, for example?

CHOPRA: Bread, you could get some. Yeah, there were some bread places, but not many great eating places. There were some. Not totally starved for it. The culture was the low point. Very little in the culture.

HEATH: So, your social life was it mainly with other Bank people in the '70s?

CHOPRA: Regrettably. Regrettably so. We've been trying ever since to expand out, and since I retired in particular and Marie started working law, she was dealing with (inaudible) full time. So, our social set has completely changed.

HEATH: Would it be fair to say that, as a staff member, you lived in a sort of bubble. You didn't really have much sense, or you didn't discuss what was going on outside the Bank. I mean, is that fair?

CHOPRA: We had very few friends outside the Bank, but we discussed all kinds of things.

HEATH: I see.

CHOPRA: But there was a --

HEATH: What were the big topics you remember from dinner parties, and so forth, in those days?

CHOPRA: Oh, politics was always important. The economic and social situation in the U.S. was an important topic. We had a few friends who were non-Bank. But no, the shortage of interest in conversation was not there. Although regrettably, too higher proportioned was talking about the Bank. Can't help if you put them all together, and then go back to talking about your own situation and your gripes and your mission problems and what not.

HEATH: Sure. Ram, is there anything that you'd like to add finally before we wrap up about anything? Anything you'd like to put on the record, things you remember about your high points, low points.

CHOPRA: We're getting away from McNamara now? Just more generally...

HEATH: Yes, generally yes. Tell us if you --

CHOPRA: I didn't feel like this was much more than about McNamara. I thought it was supposed to be a McNamara focused thing and it wasn't.

HEATH: Well, I mean, I was asking you about the -- mainly about the -- I kept going back to

the 1970s. So, I didn't just mean the personality of McNamara, I meant the period.

CHOPRA: Very good. Okay, no, I don't think so, I think I've talked enough.

HEATH: Nothing. No hilarious, embarrassing incidents that you recollect from this?

CHOPRA: Lots of them.

HEATH: This is where the flavor of the interviews comes out. Can you remember anything you'd like to share with us or is that inappropriate, unfair of me to ask?

CHOPRA: Now, I'm trying to remember. I'm drawing a blank.

HEATH: Was there a sense of fun in the Bank, or was it really a grey institution; like people didn't really make jokes much?

CHOPRA: I think there was too much greyness. I think you talked to anybody who notices a retiree group passing by. A staff member says, you must be retired, you look different. Even now. It used to be true then, it's true now.

HEATH: You mean the people became happier when they retired, they became more carefree.

CHOPRA: Very definitely.

HEATH: Right, right.

CHOPRA: You know, I notice it. I do notice it when people leave.

HEATH: Right, yeah. Was there a sense there's certain things we can't talk about. Things, no go areas, because we don't want to upset people. Because, there's a sensitivity about something or about race for example, or ethnic differences or men, women differences. Were there whole

areas where you couldn't talk about things, or am I exaggerating?

CHOPRA: Personally, I don't recall feeling muzzled by that kind of taboo. But more broadly speaking, people didn't open up easily, so there was some sense of being careful. I think back on mission travel, being together for two or three weeks, and meeting the same people now after retirement, it is shocking to realize how little one got to know of each other's personal lives outside the Bank and this mediate. So, yeah, the conversation was a bit limited. Yeah, yeah.

I used to have a rule when I went on mission. I started implementing it much to my own -- I take credit for this one. I can't take credit for much in my life, but this one I will. Literally, I was in the Bank for the first year, one year, and I had a pretty serious older English head of mission, and we had gone to Syria.

HEATH: Can you mention his name?

CHOPRA: Do you need it?

HEATH: Well, if you don't want to it's all right.

CHOPRA: Well, why?

HEATH: No, it's all right.

CHOPRA: It can't help me.

HEATH: No, of course, of course.

CHOPRA: Very nice chap. Quite nice even outside of working hours and social meetings, but a serious fellow. To him, everything was about work. So, about three days, we went through this, and since I was the only person from his program division, all of their older people for different disciplines. It was a pretty large mission, ten people. I became the deputy, although

much younger than most of the people on the mission.

They all came to me and says, can you do something about this? I said yeah, I've been thinking about doing it, so I said leave it to me, I'll go and have a drink with him at the end of the day. I said to him, first time we are traveling when we had worked together for almost a year now. I have a suggestion to bring to you. He said, what's that? I said, people are finding it very hard to have the long days, and every evening we sit in your room and talk for two hours about the work and prepare for the next day. He said, well we have to do that.

So, I said here's my proposal. We will not do any of these long meetings. If you think you must meet every day, keep it to a half an hour. But beyond that half hour, we are going to make this a more fun group. He said, how are you going to do that? I said well, I'm going to organize drinks and what not in our room. In your room, you have the big room after your half hour if you particularly want it.

Formally speaking what I propose to you is you run this mission till 6:30 or whatever it is, the half hour ends, after that, I'm in charge. I'll take care of the social side and making it fun. He said, well things will suffer. I said I'm the deputy, I'm supposed to write the ultimate report, you know I'm going to write it. I said, I take responsibility.

If you judge afterwards, after this experiment, that you haven't got what you wanted, and I can't write the report for you as you want it, you kick me out. Or whatever you need to do, give me a bad rap on my review. He said if that's the condition, accepted. Then at the end of the mission he said to me, I've never had so much fun in my 25 years.

HEATH: So, what did you get them doing?

CHOPRA: Oh, we used to go out for dinner and drinks together. But basically, if we had to chat, instead of sitting around being very serious about chatting about the work. At the end of the day, compulsory, you know. Open a bar, everybody brings a bottle of something and we're going to drink and chat and drink. Go out for dinner together, instead of just going out to the

same restaurant downstairs and having a meal or something. We just became fun. It made it more normal kind of travel, you know, at least after a certain part of the day. So, that gives you a flavor of what you're asking.

HEATH: No, yes it does.

CHOPRA: You know, how limited the old missions used to be.

HEATH: But finally, how did you keep in touch with your family back home when you were on mission?

CHOPRA: Oh, that was a very stupid thing the Bank had. They limited what phone bills you could run up. I think you were allowed maybe one call a week, or something like that. Or one call a trip. Something very silly.

HEATH: Right. And they actually specified the number of minutes you were allowed to talk?

CHOPRA: Yeah. We could make a call.

HEATH: Because in those days it was expensive, wasn't it?

CHOPRA: Yeah, very expensive. So, expecting not all five, ten minutes or something like that. So, that was a ridiculous thing. We used to have to find all kinds of ways to get your family to call you, this that or the other.

HEATH: Right.

CHOPRA: Go to some phone where you could pay something, whatever. It made it silly, very silly.

HEATH: Ram, we've spoken for over two hours. It's been a fascinating conversation. I feel we

got a lot out of it.

CHOPRA: Thank you. Sorry I don't remember that much.

HEATH: No, no you've shared lots of different perspectives of the way things were in those days. Thank you so much.

CHOPRA: Thank you.

* * * * *