

THE WORLD BANK GROUP

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Transcript of interview with

LUIS DESCAIRE

**October 19 and 26, 2004
Washington, D.C.**

Interview by: Marie T. Zenni

Session 1
October 19, 2004
Washington, D.C.

ZENNI: Today is Tuesday, October 19, 2004, and I'm here at World Bank headquarters to conduct an interview with Luis Descaire, current Director of the General Services Department, who will soon be retiring after quite a lengthy career at the Bank, spanning a little over 35 years. Welcome, Mr. Descaire.

DESCAIRE: Thank you.

ZENNI: I would like to begin by briefly covering your career prior to joining the World Bank, mainly your educational background, and what in particular influenced your decision to join the Bank in August of '69?

DESCAIRE: Sure. I guess I should go back a few years before I came to the institution. My parents migrated to the Republic of Panama from Spain, and I joined them when I was 12, for reasons that I probably don't need to go into. I graduated from high school in Panama at the age of 15, too young to attend college. I was well trained, especially in math and sciences, and I applied for a job in the Canal Zone with International Telephone & Telegraph. I worked for that company for five years as a communications technician. I had exposure to electronic communications and decided to study electrical engineering.

I came to the United States to study electrical engineering. I studied one year in Los Angeles and then came to Washington. I joined the World Bank in 1969, and studied at George Washington University at night. I started as a records assistant and moved up to Supervisor, Central Files, in 1972. The Bank was growing pretty fast in those days.

ZENNI: Yes. Please describe your early experience as you worked in the Administration Department, Records and Communications Division?

DESCAIRE: In the late '70s, I was appointed Chief, Cable Section. At that time, the Cable Office was the Bank's main avenue for communication with our clients. Telex communications were widely used worldwide. The Cable Office was a 24 hour operation with most of the work requiring manual labor, resulting in considerable bottlenecks. My main objective was to automate the operation as much as possible, which we did with the introduction of the first message switch in the Bank.

ZENNI: Please discuss the administrative changes that took place during this time within the Administration Department?

DESCAIRE: I don't remember ADM being seriously affected by any reorganization, I should say, until probably early '80s. The division that I became deputy division chief of was no longer Records and Communications. Records Management moved and the division was renamed the Communications Division. In 1984, the division chief for whom I worked left the Bank, and I

was asked as deputy division chief to serve as acting division chief for a year. Afterwards, I became division chief in . .

ZENNI: October '85, you were promoted to division chief?

DESCAIRE: October of '85, that's right. I was promoted to division chief after a year of acting.

ZENNI: Yes, and not long thereafter, in June of '86, the Administration Services Department was terminated with the creation of two separate departments: GSD, General Services Department, and ITF, Information Technology & Facilities.

DESCAIRE: Right.

ZENNI: Please describe your responsibilities as a newly appointed manager, and what objectives and priorities did you set for yourself at that time?

DESCAIRE: At that time, I become part of a relatively smaller department. We had six divisions and we were coming from a huge department that had probably 10 or 12. We were much more focused on one main objective: to provide the best quality services to our clients.

ZENNI: What impact did the organizational changes in '87 have on your work in terms of the responsibilities and objectives you wanted to pursue?

DESCAIRE: With the reorganization of 1987 the budget pressure began; we started outsourcing and used temporary staff quite heavily. When Harold Messenger became our Director we developed strategies to downsize the department, a strategy which we have followed ever since. My approach to downsizing is to do it deliberately but keeping in mind the needs of both the institution and the staff. The Bank policies on redundancy and mutually agreed separations provide opportunities to downsize, minimizing the pain inflicted on the individuals who are leaving. It also shows that the Bank is concerned for its staff, and that has a positive effect not only on those who leave, but also on those who stay.

ZENNI: Yes. Specifically, going back to the '87 reorganization, how did GSD handle the reorganization? What was your experience in terms of its impact?

DESCAIRE: With this reorganization we began a serious effort to outsource services and reduce our staff complement.

ZENNI: You were promoted to advisor in March of '94?

DESCAIRE: You are correct. I actually became Deputy Director the following year. When Pilar San Jose became Director in '94, the Facilities group came back to GSD, de facto doubling the size of the department. The Director asked me to oversee the day-to-day operation of the "old GSD" while she concentrated on managing the Facilities portion. A principal responsibility as Advisor was to complete the business process reviews for the department with the help of consultants.

ZENNI: We're talking early '95. Pre-[James D.] Wolfensohn era?

DESCAIRE: We're talking around that time, yeah. Early '95. Pre-Wolfensohn era. And this actually was very helpful because when Wolfensohn came in and he developed the--

ZENNI: Strategic Compact.

DESCAIRE: Yes, the Compact. We were ahead of the game and could show some efficiencies. For our operations the Compact was not much different than what we had done with the process reviews. However, we did take one additional action that proved very significant: the Space Efficiency Plan, which is saving \$19 million per year.

ZENNI: Okay. Please discuss how change at the helm of the Bank in June of '95, when Wolfensohn became President and the ensuing institutional changes, affected GSD's work in general, and in particular, your work as deputy director at the time?

DESCAIRE: Well, with Wolfensohn and Shengman Zhang, GSD has been able to run its services more effectively. Their support has been invaluable. Before, our efforts were not valued and the staff did not feel respected by the rest of the Bank.

ZENNI: Was it seen as a back-room operation?

DESCAIRE: Yes, but furthermore, we could not enforce the rules and, hence we were not efficient or effective. But since Wolfensohn came, this has been a presidential institution. We had been leaderless for 15 years. So he put GSD really on the map, and he and Shengman have given us the authority and the accountability to do our jobs. Without their support we would have never been able to negotiate the contract with the airlines, which are saving the Institution about \$20 million a year. And we've been able to do a lot of other things that, if we had not had a strong leader like him, we would never have been able to do.

ZENNI: Please discuss the circumstances leading to your promotion to director of GSD in February of '98.

DESCAIRE: I was in the right place at the right time. Pilar San Jose decided to retire, and I don't believe that at that time there were many qualified candidates that wanted the job. Furthermore, we had developed a renewal plan which we needed to implement, and I offered continuity.

ZENNI: What were the highlights of that plan?

DESCAIRE: The highlight of that plan was to simplify the management of GSD. We had reduced the staffing quite a bit, but we hadn't touched the top. When Pilar left, the plan had to be implemented. So I embarked on doing that.

ZENNI: Please describe your responsibilities in assuming the position of head of a department that has quite an extensive reach in providing a multitude of services to a great number of staff, both here at headquarters and in country offices. What were the challenges facing you at the time in an increasingly decentralized Bank where there were frequent moves?

DESCAIRE: I believed that if we were to be successful we needed a flatter organization, and we had to make managers and staff more responsible and accountable. We also needed to give them the freedom and the trust to do their work.

ZENNI: So you simplified procedures and processes?

DESCAIRE: Absolutely, simplified procedures and processes. And, for those people who know what they do, gave them the authority to do it . .

ZENNI: Delegated.

DESCAIRE: Yes, delegated. This has improved our services and the image of GSD enormously. It has also improved staff morale in the department enormously, as reflected in the surveys.

ZENNI: This was also a time when technology was revolutionizing the way the Bank does its business. How did this impact GSD and your work in particular?

DESCAIRE: Looking back at the years when we didn't have e-mail and all the tools that we have today, I wonder how we were able to function. Now we are totally dependent on technology.

ZENNI: When you took on the job as director of GSD, in retrospect was there one thing in particular that you think might have prepared you for that position? Why do you think were you ready then?

DESCAIRE: I started in the trenches, and that was an invaluable experience in terms of being managed, and then managing people as well as services. This is the kind of experience that you do not learn in school. It teaches you humility and allows you to understand the issues staff face every day. It is similar to the Immersion Program that the Bank developed for managers, except that instead of spending one week in a developing country you spend a few years with the rank and file. I also credit my upbringing. My parents always taught me to treat others the same way I like to be treated. That is why I dislike arrogance. Unfortunately, in this institution we have too many arrogant people.

ZENNI: Please discuss your role in moving GSD from a number of disparate services to forming a solid business foundation within the institution?

DESCAIRE: Our main objectives do not change much. We are charged with providing an array of services as cost-effectively as possible, and we are audited periodically to ensure that this is the case. In order to deliver on the objectives, we had to assemble a group of managers who

shared the vision and the objectives. By-and-large we have done that, although one is never completely successful and needs to make the necessary adjustments from time to time. Printing and Graphics, for example, recovers all its costs in an environment of open competition. This is the sort of paradigm shift that we made. We also realized that we depended on each other and that when one unit needs help the others have to help. GSD is one; a homogeneous group. The results so far have shown that it works. The feedback that I get from management, clients, and from people that know us relatively well has been very positive. We make mistakes but we learn from them. Mistakes are opportunities to improve.

ZENNI: So how would you describe or characterize GSD's foremost challenge in constantly having to adjust its priorities to ensure alignment with the Bank's strategic directions?

DESCAIRE: We just need to be prepared for changes. We have seen it over and over again: reorganizations, realignments, renewals, et cetera. They happen all the time, and we have to be ready to support them especially in our space program. We have to be ahead of the game. Decentralization to the field has also been a challenge.

ZENNI: Moving closer to our clients.

DESCAIRE: Closer to our clients, while reducing costs and resources.

ZENNI: How has outsourcing affected GSD?

DESCAIRE: Outsourcing is not the answer to the problem of resources, and many think it is, nor is cheaper necessarily better. Outsourcing is one of several options available to improve service and cost, and it must be considered in our evaluations. One of the problems with outsourcing is the negative effect on the morale of those who remain in the organization, because if the process is not justified and transparent staff loyalty suffers considerably, and this can be costly to the organization.

ZENNI: Going back to space issues, in addressing space issues, based on your experience, how important is it for GSD to be able to estimate growth as well as downsizing patterns within a new organization--and you've touched a little on some of this--given the frequency of institutional reform and an increasingly decentralized Bank?

DESCAIRE: Very important, but our success so far is close to zero. The most frustrating part of our job in terms of operations has been the inability of this institution to predict, you know . .

ZENNI: Space needs?

DESCAIRE: Yes, space needs. Space needs, which obviously have a 100 percent correlation with staffing. There is a large disconnect between the organizational units and budget groups in terms of staff projections and, unfortunately, we are caught in the middle. It is very difficult to make rational decisions under such circumstances.

ZENNI: Did you want to break for today?

DESCAIRE: Yes, why don't we do that.

ZENNI: Okay. Well, thank you for today's session.

DESCAIRE: My pleasure.

[End of session 1]

Session 2
October 26, 2004
Washington, D.C.

ZENNI: Good morning. I'm Marie Zenni. Today is Tuesday, October 26, 2004, and I'm here again at World Bank Group headquarters to resume the second and final session of my interview with Luis Descaire. Welcome, Mr. Descaire.

DESCAIRE: Thank you very much.

ZENNI: Let me begin today's session by asking you to please discuss the genesis of GSD's "Greening" efforts at the Bank, its role in promoting corporate social responsibility within the Bank, and how did the various initiatives evolve under your watch as director?

DESCAIRE: The "Greening" initiative actually began a long time ago, and my recollection is that it started--at least in GSD--as an initiative of a few staff members who were actually interested in the subject and got together and brought some ideas to bear. I've always been very interested in the environment, and I thought that they had some good ideas. So it started as a somewhat amateurish initiative; we made a list of things that we thought we could do, and we set our own objectives. Nobody asked us to do it. Staff such as Dick [Richard S.] Becker, Nino [Antonino] Fleri, and John Muir were very enthusiastic about it, and I thought they were fantastic, and I supported them completely. And so we all worked together in putting an action plan that we would review a couple of times a year and we would report it to our manager just for his information. And then, of course, later on the Bank got on the bandwagon, and there was--what do they call it?--it was some kind of report by, I think, the Rocky Mountain Corporation, which basically said that the Bank wasn't doing enough, and it certainly wasn't. They provided some additional recommendations on things that the Bank should do. And, actually, where it hit the hardest was in the way that we promote or not promote environmental issues in our lending.

ZENNI: When was that exactly?

DESCAIRE: It must be four or five years ago. There have been two reports. The first was not all that negative on the Bank. Then there was another one done maybe two years ago, which was very negative. It compared us with European organizations and it showed that we were really far behind . . .

ZENNI: As in, the Bank was doing very little on the environment within the organization itself or in its lending operations?

DESCAIRE: Actually, both. They indicated that we were hardly doing anything on our corporate procurement, on the environment and also social responsibility. It also criticized the way our pension money is being invested from a social responsibility perspective. They weren't quite correct about procurement because we had already instituted some policies on furniture, for

example, on the kind of furniture we were buying, the kind of wood that the furniture should be from and so on and so forth. So we thought that the report was a little bit unfair.

ZENNI: Is the Rocky Mountain an NGO [non-governmental organization]?

DESCAIRE: No, actually the second report was not done by Rocky Mountain. It was done by one of the Big Five. I can't remember which one it was. They brought some people from England, I remember. It was first commissioned by IFC [International Finance Corporation], and then the Bank joined. A report was issued but was not distributed very widely because a lot of people in the Bank took objection to many of the things it said. When we received the part on GSD we hired a company called Green Seal, which I believe is an NGO, and asked them to look at procurement and give us a balanced assessment and an action plan that we should implement. They prepared an objective report that was implementable.

ZENNI: But was not condemning.

DESCAIRE: Exactly. As a result, I hired Maureen Moore, who has always been very interested in issues on the environment, and I needed someone with that stature and that background in the Bank that could work with the Environment Department or ESSD [Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network], and with procurement and other areas. She has done a great job at creating a partnership with ESSD and other areas in the Bank on environmental issues, and at communicating with our partners, internally and externally. Ian Johnson told me not long ago that he has received kudos from NGOs about all the things that the Bank has been doing on the environment, which we never got before. I think that we didn't before for two reasons: one was that we weren't doing as much, but the other is that we never communicated what we did. But the institution still has a long way to go in addressing issues of social responsibility for which it is still being criticized. As for GSD, every day we do more. We've put in a lot of bicycle racks. We've added showers that we make available for people who want to bicycle or want to walk to work or want to run. We manage the Metro-check program. We just issued mugs as an incentive for staff to stop using Styrofoam cups. Every day there seems to be a new thing that comes up, and these are really initiatives that come up from Maureen and Maureen's group. She has a large group of people, not reporting to her but who are in other areas of GSD and work with her on this program.

ZENNI: Networking.

DESCAIRE: Networking, and together they come up with tons of ideas. For example, we decided to buy what they call RECs.

ZENNI: Is this an acronym?

DESCAIRE: It's an acronym for renewable energy certificates, I believe. It allows an organization to buy "clean power" in another part of the US, or even the world, clean power that may not be available in your area. This program promotes investment in renewable energy. At the moment we buy 12 percent of renewable energy directly from Bank suppliers, and the rest, eighty-eight percent in RECs from other sources in the United States. Not necessarily in your

state, because it may not be available here. It may be in Pennsylvania or Colorado, and it funds windmills or some other source of renewable energy. So the Bank is spending a sizable amount of money to pay for the other 88 percent of the energy that we cannot buy directly. We are proud to say that we get 100 percent of our energy either directly as renewable or we pay equivalent dollars so that renewable energy can be generated elsewhere. This initiative will be included in an environmental report that the Bank is putting together.

ZENNI: What kind of feedback have you been getting, first, from within the organization, and then from outside?

DESCAIRE: We're very proud that GSD basically has put the World Bank on the map in terms of being a leading institution in this field, a greening institution. What I hear from Ian Johnson and others in ESSD is that we're getting an incredible amount of kudos, whereas before we used to get nothing but criticism. But the Bank has to keep the momentum in this area, and also work with more vigor on social responsibility issues. We cannot live on the credit received for what we have achieved so far.

ZENNI: Turning to procurement, how effective, in your opinion, are current procurement safeguards within the Bank in terms of rigidity of procurement processes? How does the institution rank in terms of compliance? And what more can be done?

DESCAIRE: With procurement you always tread a fine line because if you are inflexible, then your business suffers in some ways, but if you are too flexible procurement rules are broken. There are certain fundamental requirements that you cannot break, and with Therese Ballard, who is running procurement now, I think that we have made incredible strides to save the Bank's reputation in this area. We also have a Procurement Review Committee (PRC) that is an advisory group to the director of GSD. It reviews every single procurement, purchases or contracts, greater than a million dollars, and we have many. The composition of that team is totally external to GSD. It includes lawyers, procurement advisors in Operations, accountants, and so forth. The PRC is a very effective tool to make sure that the Institution's reputation is protected from possible bad procurements.

ZENNI: So, in terms of compliance . . .

DESCAIRE: I am confident that our compliance is excellent. Suppliers have challenged our decisions from time to time, but independent reviews have always shown that we have adhered to our policies. Other organizations have asked us to share our policies and experiences with them because of our reputation. We are also very active in the Bank's anti-money laundering effort to ensure that Bank funds do not in any way end up in the hands of terrorists or corrupt organizations. So it's a difficult business to run, and every day it gets more complicated

ZENNI: Is there more that can be done?

DESCAIRE: There's always more that can be done, and we're constantly looking for new ways to catch problems before they actually happen. But you always tread that fine line; you need to get the business moving. There's only so much that you can search and research before you

actually make a decision and you award the procurement. We've put a system together to make trust fund contract activities more transparent, which took a couple of years to develop. You probably know that in the last few years we have uncovered that some trust fund monies were not used properly.

ZENNI: A controversial issue, to say the least, in the Bank.

DESCAIRE: Exactly. Consultants that work on trust funds are hired through contracts issued by Procurement, and we want to ensure that we have all the protections necessary to avoid problems like in the past.

ZENNI: Okay. In your opinion, how important is the adoption of service standards and controls, especially in addressing the challenges of ever increasing staff demands on GSD services?

DESCAIRE: Service standards are absolutely essential for a service organization like ours for two reasons: first, as a protection for the consumer, the client, that knows what service level to expect, but it's also a protection for the service provider. In this institution I find that staff take services for granted, especially if they are "free" to them. And a lot of our services are free. We've had service standards for many years; we keep them current and publish them. So it's something that we take very seriously. The standards are on our website, and we point them out all the time.

ZENNI: How would you describe the current mechanisms in place to maximize the level of services GSD offers, since a lot of GSD's service delivery hinges on building synergies, either within or outside the Bank, as well as coordinating and collaborating with the various entities?

DESCAIRE: Some years ago we launched a program of benchmarking. We have joined a US.-wide benchmarking group that compares services and costs for some 40 organizations located in the U.S. We supply our data on a yearly basis and received a report that allows us to compare with the others as well as to learn how we can manage our services and resources more effectively. In most areas we compare well. I share this information with the Bank's management in the quarterly business reviews with the MDs [managing directors]. So it's a very formal process that we embarked on three or four years ago. That's how we rate ourselves. That's how we can justify to the institution our existence. And that's how we should be rated in terms of how we manage our resources.

ZENNI: And how do you manage building synergies? A lot of the delivery of your services hinges on building synergies with other entities either within or outside the Bank.

DESCAIRE: Certainly within the Bank our sort of closest partner is ISG (Information Solutions Group); in all the moves, for example, we do it together. ISG moves the computers and we move the electrical outlets. ISG is probably our closest partner. GSD and ISG staff worked together to develop better and cheaper ways to deliver their services. We also partner with our contractors. You depend on all your partners to maximize effectiveness.

ZENNI: Okay. The challenge of communicating effectively while providing front-line services in an ever-changing, multicultural, and international environment can be quite daunting. How would you define an effective communicator? And, how would you characterize (a) the impact of the Bank's organizational culture and uniqueness of its mission on GSD in the performance and delivery of its services, and (b) GSD's relationship with the Staff Association, and how has this evolved?

DESCAIRE: I don't think that we have been very good communicators. I am not a very good communicator. My tendency is to get something done and to go to the next thing. I'm an engineer by training, and I don't think engineers are very good communicators. However, we have evolved from this, and now I think we're doing a lot better. We issue the *GSD Dispatch*, a quarterly newsletter, and I have received some very good feedback from people all over the Bank. The articles are interesting and informative for our clients.

What is a good communicator? First and foremost it is someone who listens. I like to listen to my staff at all levels, and for this reason I have an open door policy. I will admit that some of my direct reports are not comfortable with that, but on balance I am convinced it is the right thing to do. I find most times that people go into a meeting with their minds already made up, and when they listen to an argument they do so to see how they will counter the argument instead of trying to understand the other person's point of view, because maybe there's something interesting there and maybe you should change your mind. But the egos and arrogance of a lot of people in this institution prevent them from having a positive and meaningful discussion.

Then you mentioned something about the Staff Association.

ZENNI: Yes. Since you are service providers, you must have instances where some staff may resort to recourse action and go to the Staff Association to complain?

DESCAIRE: Staff go to the Staff Association from time to time. GSD has always had a positive relationship with the Staff Association, although I have been disappointed sometimes with their magazine because they're not always balanced or truthful. But we have a good dialogue, and sometimes we agree and sometimes we do not.

ZENNI: You agree to disagree.

DESCAIRE: Sometimes you have to agree to disagree. And you cannot win all the battles.

ZENNI: Yes. Your reputation within the institution is that of the consummate manager . . .

DESCAIRE: Consummate. [Laughs]

ZENNI: As director to about 250 staff and more than 1,000 contractors, please describe highlights of the various challenges you have had to deal with related to staff recruitment, staff development, cultural diversity, and gender issues.

DESCAIRE: The biggest frustration that I've had in GSD is simply with managers that don't learn how to manage their people. In fact, we just did a staff survey. We've done our own staff survey for the first time comprising 11 questions, and the questions we asked the staff, for example, are: "Is the work flow in my group well organized? My work group has a climate in which diverse perspectives are valued. In my group, we treat each other with respect. In my group, I'm involved in decisions that affect my work. My manager treats me with respect. My manager encourages open and honest discussion. I receive open and honest feedback from my colleagues. My manager demonstrates the people management skills to effectively lead the group. I'm able to get the knowledge and information I need to do my job. I have sufficient flexibility to meet my personal and family needs." And GSD has a work environment and culture which facilitates and motivates its staff to deliver service excellence. These are the 11 questions that we decided to ask GSD staff, by unit, all 12 of them including my own. We will do this periodically until staff in every unit is managed effectively and are happy coming to work.

We are taking this very seriously as we are convinced that an organization must create an environment where people like to come to work and give 100 percent to the institution. If staff are not treated with respect and if managers don't listen to them, if we don't create this type of environment, staff will not give 100 percent, and this is not right for the institution. The results of this survey will give managers the opportunity to correct their behaviors. If they do not they will be replaced. My biggest frustration is that I do not believe that I have convinced all our GSD managers that this is the right path to follow.

ZENNI: What about cultural diversity and gender issues?

DESCAIRE: In GSD we have a diversity board that oversees the departmental progress in this regard. Our diversity numbers have improved considerably, and we are meeting some of the Bank's goals. We exceed the goal on the number of women managers at Level H. In terms of Part II nationals, I've had an argument with the institution because we find ourselves hiring Part II staff just to see them change their nationality and become Part I. Diversity should be about culture, not about a passport. If all we are doing is counting passports, then I think it's a joke.

I have made a similar argument regarding racial diversity. The Bank counts all Americans and Europeans as white, and all African and Caribbean citizens as black. So Africans who become US citizens become white. The whole thing does not make sense. The Bank should be more serious about this whole diversity issue; otherwise, managers will assume that it is another fad.

ZENNI: In general, how would you describe overall institutional support to GSD in terms of allocation of resources, specifically, human resources?

DESCAIRE: Overall it is fine, but there's still too much collegiality among top managers in the Bank. Some Vice Presidents who are clearly not cost conscious are not taken to task. In the front line, there's a lot of waste, and that should be addressed.

ZENNI: On the staffing issue?

DESCAIRE: I mentioned earlier that GSD has reduced its staff from 400 to 240 and this is still ongoing. And GSD is not worse for it. We have outsourced, automated, reduced certain programs, and we are doing things differently. I think we're doing things better. But we have to be careful that we don't go too far.

ZENNI: In general, when you need support, how easy or difficult is it to obtain it?

DESCAIRE: I am blessed by having the best manager in the Bank, Shengman Zhang, who is very supportive. Obviously, we have to present a convincing case. I really cannot complain at all on the way resources have been allocated to us. We have proved to the Bank that we have used our resources very effectively, and SFR [self-financing ratio] has statistics to prove that.

ZENNI: Okay. Please discuss how have the events of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath, changed the way GSD does business, specifically, with regards to the daunting task of managing security issues?

DESCAIRE: Before September 11, security was probably the foster child of GSD. The guard force was there to please the staff and to act as receptionists. September 11 obviously has changed everybody's life, and certainly the Bank's. We have invested in large amounts of money to make ourselves more secure. But given our location there is only so much one can do. Security is always on our minds now, whereas before it never was. We have a crisis management team, and we meet regularly. We're constantly worried about what happens in our country offices, probably more than what happens here. Here, we can protect ourselves easier than in country offices. Here we have the intelligence from the FBI [U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation] and the CIA [U.S. Central Intelligence Agency] and the [U.S.] Secret Service that are available to us and we use it constantly. But overseas, we're at the mercy of the protection of the host government, and sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not. So, we're always worried. In Pakistan, for example, a missile exploded not too far from our office. We're constantly worried about that, and we're constantly visiting these offices to improve their security conditions.

ZENNI: So, would you say it has been taxing in some areas?

DESCAIRE: It's been very taxing. I know that the people who work in security are under a lot of stress. I see Peter Gallant, Duncan Nott, Gordon McIntosh and others under a lot of stress many times.

ZENNI: In your opinion, how might the predominance of security issues nowadays translate in terms of redefining GSD's role/profile within the institution? In other words, how important is GSD in today's environment, and how do you see its role evolving in terms of the challenges that lie ahead?

DESCAIRE: There was a time when GSD was not too well respected and taken for granted, and, I don't think it was because we were not delivering, but rather, because we were at the back of the bus.

ZENNI: Considered a back-room function?

DESCAIRE: It was very much of a back-room function and nobody really cared. But with Wolfensohn coming in, he put GSD sort of in the middle of the bus and now we are at the table. The Director of GSD now is part of Corporate Day. The GSD Director is the only director of a large group that I know of that reports directly to an MD. So GSD has now become a player. Now, when 9/11 happened then GSD became an important player, not just a player but a very important player that a lot of the VPUs [vice presidential units] now rely on for advice. Nobody travels overseas now, or gets posted overseas without having a briefing. Pete Gallant, the division chief of security, was an unknown entity. I would say 99.9 percent of the people in the Bank did not know his name. Today, it is the other way around. And 100 percent of the Vice Presidents know him personally and deal with him personally, not through me, but directly. So, GSD has become very prominent, and to a large extent it has been because of this security issue, but not exclusively.

ZENNI: Okay. Would you say there are comparisons to be made with what the advent of technology did in raising ISG's profile within the Institution to the level of Vice Presidency?

DESCAIRE: Well, I think that what happened in ISG, in thinking back to when it was a department and when it became a Vice Presidency . .

ZENNI: You mean what happened, as in technological revolution?

DESCAIRE: It was a technological revolution, and when the Bank was searching for a CIO [chief information officer] and could not attract highly qualified candidates, it was a wake-up call. The Bank had not realized how important technology was becoming at the time.

ZENNI: Then, might the current emphasis on security issues do for GSD what the technology revolution did for ISG?

DESCAIRE: I don't think so.

ZENNI: Under your leadership, GSD has earned the reputation of delivering "unobtrusive" services. Are there instances where you felt that efforts were under-appreciated precisely because of their unobtrusiveness? And, in your opinion, what more does the institution need to learn about GSD in order to perhaps better help it in the delivery of its services?

DESCAIRE: I think that some people think that we deliver unobtrusively, while others, when things don't go their way, feel that we are obtrusive, inflexible, and difficult. It happens primarily with procurement, space, travel services, and with other services as well. We receive requests for sole source procurements all the time which are totally unjustified according to the institution's policies, which, by the way, are always scrutinized by IAD [Internal Audit Vice Presidency]. When we deny these requests we are, or course, criticized. The Bank spends public funds, and we have to ensure that they are spent correctly.

ZENNI: So what more, do you feel, does the institution need to know about GSD? Are there areas where you feel that the institution should learn more about GSD in order to perhaps better help it in the delivery of its services?

DESCAIRE: Staff should understand that we have professionals managing these services, who are as professional as those running their programs. They have to accept that we must adhere to the rules for the benefit of the institution. Unfortunately, many staff think they can do our job better than we can. I suppose I have also sometimes felt that I can do their job better than they can.

ZENNI: Yes, the nature of the organizational culture.

DESCAIRE: Yes, yes, the organizational culture.

ZENNI: Okay. Moving on to reflections, what should the institution look for in terms of requisite qualities and attributes in its search for your successor?

DESCAIRE: Well, you know, my successor has already been picked, and I actually was not consulted.

ZENNI: This was my follow-up question in terms of what input have you had in the process, based on your extensive experience.

DESCAIRE: The answer is none. But I am sure that the selection has been good from what I know of the individual, Van Pulley. He has always worked in the front line, and has even done some corporate jobs. And, he's also been in country offices twice.

ZENNI: As country director?

DESCAIRE: One as country director, the other I think they used to call it . . .

ZENNI: Resident rep?

DESCAIRE: Yeah, resident representative. So he is very familiar with the kinds of services that are needed for the front line. He's bringing a perspective that GSD doesn't have very much of right now. We don't have anybody with . .

ZENNI: Operational experience, plus . . .

DESCAIRE: Plus the country office experience, especially the country offices perspective. We have had the operational perspective, but the country office perspective we have not had. And I think it's very important because more and more country offices are leading our operations. Now country directors are making the decisions, so they have become much more important to the work of the Bank than they ever were. I hope he is a good coach, someone who cares about

people. We have a lot of people here who feel that the rest of the institution doesn't care much for them.

The qualities that you need to be director of GSD are not to be the best engineer or the best translator or the best facilities person or the best security individual or any of that. You need to create synergies, talk to people, coordinate, smooth things out. That's the kind of individual that is needed, and someone that can communicate well with the staff, senior management, and hopefully can communicate a little better than I have been communicating with the rest of the Bank.

ZENNI: What about outside of the Bank?

DESCAIRE: And outside of the Bank as well, of course. We have a lot of partnerships outside of the Bank. That's also very, very important.

ZENNI: So what advice would you want to give your successor?

DESCAIRE: First and foremost he needs to make decisions that benefit the institution, not his career. He also needs to remember that he will only be successful if he treats GSD staff well and relies on their expertise. He needs to uphold GSD's values. It's all about the institution, and its people.

ZENNI: And communicate.

DESCAIRE: And communicate, communicate. Listen, listen, listen, listen, listen.

ZENNI: Based on your experience of over 35 years by now of service in the Bank, in your opinion, how much room is there within the Bank's organizational culture for innovation and personal growth?

DESCAIRE: There is much room. This institution tolerates staff arrogance far too much. An arrogant staff should never make it to manager, but they keep promoting them. It is time that we insist in adhering to the values that we publish in our manuals. Unfortunately, we are very good at writing policies, but far less successful at implementing or enforcing them. We do not walk the talk. We talk a lot about the importance of behavior and values, but in the end it is about who has taken more loans to the Board or who has written more policy papers.

ZENNI: Looking back at your career in the Bank, what has been the most difficult and/or most frustrating task to implement, and what has been the most rewarding?

DESCAIRE: Maybe the Space Efficiency Plan. The most difficult tasks tend to also be the most rewarding. But there are many other rewarding things that I've done, such as establishing the Public Information Center program for another Vice-Presidency in two months, because somebody else had been asked to do it in six months and four months had passed and there was no progress. The Board and the U.S. Government had been given January 1st as a date that the first PIC would be operating because it had to do with the disclosure of information.

ZENNI: Disclosure of Information Policies?

DESCAIRE: Exactly. And they were told that by January 1st the first PIC would be open. And it was, I think, at the end of October when I got the call. But the SEP was much more complicated because it affected everybody in the Bank and it was a three year project; it was quite daunting.

ZENNI: Tough deadlines?

DESCAIRE: Tough deadlines. We had deadlines and we had \$50 million to do it. No more. Actually, we returned a million dollars to the Bank. But I will be very proud of the PIC because now obviously the PIC program has flourished, and there's a PIC in every country office.

ZENNI: Of your many contributions to the Bank's mission, is there one in particular that you see as the most significant? Or is there one in particular that you would like for it to be the most significant?

DESCAIRE: Maybe the fact that in the last ten years we have reduced our budget by some \$40 or \$50 million, probably more. I think it's an incredible accomplishment. This is an important contribution to the front line of the organization. I would have liked to get a percentage on the savings!

ZENNI: A commission?

DESCAIRE: I am joking, of course. We've been able to accomplish all that, while budgets elsewhere in the Bank have been increasing, without compromising the quality of our services. So we have really found solutions, and I say "we" because it hasn't just been me; we have a team in GSD.

ZENNI: Demands have increased on your services also.

DESCAIRE: The demands have increased.

ZENNI: Plus the security issues?

DESCAIRE: Exactly. Obviously, the money that we put into security has increased tremendously, which shows that the rest of GSD has shrunk much more than we have increased on the security side. John Wilton and his staff have recognized our accomplishments publicly many times.

ZENNI: What has it meant to you personally working for such a unique institution as the World Bank?

DESCAIRE: I don't think that anybody can have an experience more fulfilling than working in this place. With all its faults the positives outweigh the negatives by quantum leaps. Where else

can you meet people from 120, 130 different countries? Where else can you be exposed to all these cultures, the richness of the conversations that you have with these people? All I need to do is just go out of my office, and I have people from all over the world: Vietnam, Iran, Pakistan, every place in South America, from everywhere. It's been just an incredible ride, and it is a shame it has to end. Everything ends, so I'm fine with it. But it's been an incredible ride, and I think it's basically because of the people that I've met in this place. The job has been interesting, but you can find interesting jobs in other places. But I don't think you can find the environment, the cultures that you find here.

ZENNI: Finally, is there anything else that you wish to discuss that I might have perhaps overlooked?

DESCAIRE: I don't think you've overlooked anything. You're a fantastic interviewer who has done her homework very, very well. When I read the questions, I was amazed actually at how much time you must have taken to learn about GSD and about myself to be able to put this together. So I tip my hat to you.

ZENNI: Thank you, Luis, very much, and many thanks for a most productive interview and for your invaluable contribution to the Bank's oral history program.

DESCAIRE: Thank you very much. It's been a pleasure.

[End of interview]