**Interview Transcript**

**Participant 18**

Interviewer: Okay, so for my first question just do you mind introducing yourself and telling me a little bit about who you are and where you're from and what your education and like employment background are?

Participant: Okay yeah, so my name is \_\_\_ and I have undergraduate and graduate degree. Went to… I have an MBA from a place called Wharton. I worked at Exxon IBM Price Waterhouse Coopers for 20 30 years and currently working as xxx independent consultant, but with a small… as a contractor to a small consulting firm. I focused on mostly in utility and infrastructure industries and progressed through the ranks to an executive level in those organizations.

Interviewer: Gotcha and so where are you located now?

Participant: So I live in Virginia. So pretty much the Mid Atlantic I traveled between here in Pennsylvania and Delaware.

Interviewer: Gotcha and you're working as an independent contractor now? Or are you working for a very like a particular company?

Participant: So an independent contractor working…

Interviewer: I mean sorry consultant not contractor.

Participant: Yeah, well consultant, but primarily with one company. I do some other things small put small things on the side.

Interviewer: I see um, can you tell me a little bit more about what your day-to-day work looks like?

Participant: Dealing with clients, so I help structure contracts, ensure project delivery. I

primarily focus on technology related things for utility companies, infrastructure companies.

Sometimes they are vendors to those industries, so my major client right now is a software company that provides services to telecom, utility companies, gas companies, etc.

Interviewer: About how long have you been doing this work?

Participant: In general, so I kind of came into the consulting industry around 19… a long time ago. About (19) 89. 88 or 89.

Interviewer: And now how long have you been with this particular company that's your main client?

Participant: It’s about four or five years.

Interviewer: Four or Five years. Cool.

Participant: So, until then, I retired from IBM.

Interviewer: Okay

Interviewer: So when I retired from IBM I joined another ex-IBM employee as part of his company basically.

Interviewer: I see. So, how do you feel about your job, what do you like about it, what do you what would you change, and if you could rate it on a scale from 1 to 10, what would you give it?

Participant: My current job I’d say it is probably 8. And I like it because I don't have to work. I don't have to work so I work part-time, so it gives me flexibility to do other things that I want to do. I have grandkids, and so I want to spend time with them. I have some hobbies that I like to spend time on and taking care of some other family matters, so I can balance it. And the guy that I work for, he totally understands that. He’s always careful to not have me overstretch. On the actual work side, it's fun and it's mentally engaging. I like problem solving and my client has a lot of problems. They can’t always seem to solve them or because it's not one person can make a decision, right? It's an organization. So I find that enjoyable and then you know when I actually be able to assign new work. That yeah, you know, it feels good that we're actually providing some value and then, when we actually deliver on the work that's even better so.

Interviewer: What about your work with IBM? What was that like?

Participant: Well, I went from I was with PwC consulting. They were acquired by IBM. So when you work for an audit firm, you can't imagine really much more structure than that accounting firm. I was wrong. IBM was much, you know, orders of magnitude more bureaucratic. But I really enjoyed working for them for the longest time because of afforded more opportunity in my opinion. You know, I could, you know, I could delve into different things, learn new things, work with different clients, and so it was good from that perspective but towards the end of my career there, it just got to be a numbers game which was a lot less enjoyable.

Interviewer: Sure. Other than bureaucratic, can you tell me a little more about the culture and like overall atmosphere of the company and you can say the same thing for your current role now?

Participant: Yeah, so you know the funny thing, one of the things that I learned, when I was with PwC and with IBM because I continued working with the same people even after the acquisition is that… I guess I was more conscious, self-conscious about working in a white male environment. When, you know, we would go to management meetings, you could look around the room, very few women. I mean maybe we'll call it less than 5% and equally small numbers of minority groups, Asian, African American, etc. But when I mentioned that to, you know, my manager at the time, it's like “what are you talking about? You're just one of the guys, so no, not really…” So the perspectives are different.

What I also found is that I have clients all over the country, I even did some international travel for IBM. It was a very different, you know, because what I found on the east coast predominantly of the US is that the white male organization is what, you know, IBM and PwC mirror that pretty well with the client. When I did work in southern California, it was very different. But you know, was kind of because it was an East coast driven organization. It was… we didn't have that same diversity compared with our clients have in California. And then, in the Midwest we also have… who was much more similar to kind of a white male demographic. Management team was.

Interviewer: So not necessarily for the entire company, but for the management?

Participant: Right. Well, I’ve worked a lot with utility companies and a lot of, you know, the field workers. You know there may be more diverse, especially in urban areas. But in, you know, even in the Midwest, right? There's plenty of unions and stuff like that, so you couldn't associate diversity.

Interviewer: Why do you think that they there was such a lack of diversity in the different companies that you were working with and in your own company?

Participant: I think yeah… it's the old-boys network or whatever, but just being able to have an affinity right stuff that connection, I mean one of the things I saw just as a non-certainly racial or demographic type of thing per say. It is yeah… one of my clients now who's the CEO of this small software company, who lived in New York for a few years. One of my project managers and also those New York. So when they first met, because I was have him working on one of his projects because kind of an instant connection. It's like “oh yeah and this neighborhood in that neighborhood,” you know, “this is a great place,” etc. You know that kind of connection. My thought was hard because I didn't necessarily have the same interest with the same background. My upbringing was much more blue-collar than white-collar. And so yeah… I think some of those the experiential differences and the background kind of foster…so you promote people who look and behave and have the same background as you. The kind of the whole concept of diversity is more of a mandate or regulatory requirements and a natural one. My opinion anyway.

Interviewer: Sure, sure. Did you feel like you could be yourself at work or did you feel like you needed to act, a certain way?

Participant: In terms of my personal background, it was kind of 50/50. Insofar as you know, I wasn't playing, you know, good Chinese-race-card, right? But you know, I was aware of it. It was never like the forefront of our service like a specific topic warranted that. In terms of my personality though, I did have to behave differently than I would normally behave. I’m a very introverted person. But as I learned, as I moved up the ranks, if you will, I was representing the company more and more both to know my team, as well as to the client. So it felt like whenever I was on business trips and I traveled a lot, I was always on stage, so to speak, which for me wasn't the most comfortable thing, but it was kind of… I didn't mind doing it after a while but getting up and talking in front of 100 people is not really my thing.

Interviewer: Yea it that sounds difficult. Did you ever have to do anything like to cope with that or to strategize for that?

Participant: Oh yeah. It was practice and you know. Yeah, I would just prepare as much as I could. And you know I’ve learned a lot of things going through that whole experience, where we would bring in coaches. To help sell a deal and that sort of thing, and they would tell me what I should be doing. And that was you know, for me, anyway, it was very painful, it was very interesting to me because some people, you know, when they were looking for volunteers like “yes me first, me first” and sign and they loved giving the feedback. So that was painful, my case.

Interviewer: What about your colleagues or your clients? Sorry I didn't mean to interrupt you.

Participant: No, it's okay good.

Interviewer: With your colleagues and your coworkers, instead of your clients like, did you feel more comfortable with them? Were you friends with anyone you worked with, or was it strictly professional?

Participant: No, I mean it was harder for me to get to know people, personally. I mean harder than I would like to and… But yeah, I definitely, you know, have friends or coworkers, colleagues both on my level below me and above me. So that wasn't really an issue, but I plan on the client side, it was a little harder for me, because I tend to be you know kind of what I call transactional focus, so if I need to do something every job if I don't need something kind of… It kind of falls to bottom of the stack. But that's just what I deal with the world.

Interviewer: That’s fair. Did you ever get a sense that race or gender or age or anything else mattered for how you were viewed at work or how you retreated?

Participant: Yeah I mean even when recently right dealing with the CTO of this one software company. Yeah he... You know he's in the Midwest right. He's grown up in the Midwest and Ohio and so, you know, my boss, who is a white male right, and I talked to him and it's like “Oh well,” you know, there's not a lot of trust, initially, you know at this point, though I’ve kind of I think 1am over right, not as a friend, but at least as a collaborator right, So I think some of that is just because I don't know how much diversity he's really experienced. In addition, you know, I bought an onshore team to help him do his development and offshore team, rather it is not based in India. So it conceptually feels like his mindless I get it it's low cost equivalent quality yada yada yada, but I think it was challenging for him. But, you know, I mentioned that to my boss, and “I don't think that's true.” But you know it's kind of an unconscious bias, I think, just because you're not used to, and you don't have kind of that same experience and background. And since I haven't had the same level of technical depth that he had then on top of that, you know, kind of the whole experience. As opposed to saying the CEO and this project manager, but “oh I know that neighborhood really well” and so yeah, we had more things to share right off the bat.

Interviewer: Sure. Did you ever experience any sort of like racial comments or anything of that nature or stereotyping?

Participant: No that I know at work. I mean outside of work, you know, society is what it is. But I mean, maybe early on… I was an MBA working for, you know, this guy out of Ohio State University, you know for a year. And you know, he was… I mean I’d say he was very interested in my background not kind of like asking lots of questions, but he recognized that it was different, but not in a negative way. It's like he just wanted to understand. But I haven't really…I haven't really felt that, and you know I think there were times when I was being considered a poor partner that I thought that maybe, you know, kind of the race card was affecting me. But…

Interviewer: In like a positive way, or a negative way?

Participant: In a negative way. You know, and this is probably rationalization of my part. It's hard to say because you know there's an expectation of being out there, and you know being that kind of overall doesn't really exist, the typical white male leader type of role, and I didn't fit, right. Whereas I know other people who, you know, none you know, minority folks who could do that, and they also had a similar problem so it's like well how much of that is race versus how much of that it’s just the personality profile haven't adapted.

Interviewer: Sure, yeah it's difficult to tell ha.

Participant: Right then, you know, and I worked at PwC when you know, a woman, who did not make partner, filed a lawsuit against Price Waterhouse and she won, and so they had to admit her as a partner. And you know, of course I'll be internal scuttlebutt was that she was a real pain in the ass to work with. I think I met her once or twice. She seems challenging to work with, so it's like well you can kind of understand you have to have that type of personality in order to, you know, proceed, and when that kind of lawsuit right, discrimination lawsuit and then to actually take the job you fought for.

Interviewer: It seems like it would be really uncomfortable.

Participant: For everyone.

Interviewer: Right.

Participant: Right yeah but yeah well what I learned from that is that, you know, some people just don't mind or even enjoy conflict, which is not my personality.

Interviewer: Not your personality um…Do you think of any times when there were conflicts that you had to deal with?

Participant: Conflicts about…?

Interviewer: Interpersonal conflicts or any kind of conflict that…

Participant: Oh yeah. It's… I guess it turns out to be it's a long career. So, oh yeah, I mean I had to fire someone who was kind of hot headed. So, it's like “well here's what's going to happen.” Not the most comfortable thing to do. But you know, in the end, he took it well. And then there's also, you know, conflicts a lot less direct than that which is how do I inform someone that their project is doomed to failure and how do I address that, yeah because I’d be propagated by, you know, some executive team to do a review and say here's what's coming right, here's what's going wrong, there's something need to do to fix it, and they say “no we're not doing that.” Or you know, more often than not actually they'd say, “oh well, we've already done that.” So to discredit the recommendation, it's a fine line.

Interviewer: They would break the bridge and come in and not take the advice of the consultant give?

Participant: Or what would happen is, you know, I ended up turning into like a reporter. So I would go, I would observe, I talked to the lead so “here are the things I think you should do.” So that by the time the report came out to their leadership, it's like “Oh well, we've already done these things and we chose not to do these.” It’s like you know some leadership say “okay well yeah we understand why you didn't do those things; We were glad you did what you did right, so by the time I report out to them, it's kind of like “well okay thanks very much.” But you know, get paid to do the job so but I did the job. And they did accomplish the end goal so they were just lower budget way, typical.

Interviewer: Fair. And what kind of person are you emotionally…Are you the kind of person who tends to openly share what you're feeling, or do you tend to keep that sort of private?

Participant: I tend to keep it private. Yeah, it takes a lot for me to let it out. But yeah as a result, I think I’m pretty even keel. So I tend not to blurt things out like they come out in my head before I say something. And I think sometimes that's helpful and sometimes it's not because you can kind of come across as cold and calculating to know warm, and I don't know… personal maybe.

Interviewer: Did any of that feel like racially connected or just the personality thing?

Participant: It's hard for me to separate that I mean…

Interviewer: Sure, sure.

Participant: I mean, I can look at my family, but I grew up in my siblings’. And I can look at my kids, and they're very different. So, I was the son of immigrants, but I was born here in the US. So kind of… You know, we were very generally speak, well, I think almost universally we're all very introverted. When I graduated high school, for example, there were three Asian, three Chinese people, three Asians in the graduating class of just about 1000. So we're in suburban America whatever, you know, but my dad did take us to, you know, learn martial arts just for some protection type of thing, so I didn't feel that risk there that I will get into one fight, which was a very short fight. But I think kind of that upbringing was very insular right, so my grandparents and my parents who are immigrants, my grandmother really wanted us to learn and accept the culture. You know when you're one out of 1000 right, it's like… I rejected the culture as a teenager.

Interviewer: Is his Chinese culture you mean or?

Participant: Yea.

Interviewer: OK.

Participant: And then I went to college it's like wow there's a lot more of these people like me. That's I opened myself up to that, so here's kind of just a reversal, but by then kind of my personality is all set.

Interviewer: Sure, can you think of any times when you felt particularly emotional at work?

Participant: Yeah, I was running a project. You know what I would call the first of a kind project, so it hadn't been done before. It was a pretty big project. At the time, we were struggling with some security issues, and so the timeline was very…was at risk. And I was also working with a team in India who were supposed to be my security specialist, who might have lost confidence. In the meanwhile I’ve got, you know, senior execs asking me, you know, from my company IBM, and from my client company saying “well what's wrong, how are we going to fix this.” So that was very disheartening because I felt personally responsible for the success of the project. You know, and pulled you know multiple all nighters in order to try to get it done. You know didn't come home for three weeks that sort of thing. So it's pretty stressful.

Interviewer: Sure, what sorts of emotions were you feeling at that time, like worried?

Participant: Well, I mean beyond worried, you know, it was just failure right. I couldn't deliver. But you know, fortunately, I had a good team yeah not just below me but above me that helped me work through some of those things. I literally dug into what needed to get done and just became very directive, as opposed to collaborative. And so we didn't get it installed. It's always a monthly. But, at the time it was… there were a lot of people to account to.

Interviewer: Very stressful. Are there any other times that you can think of?

Participant: Other times when, you know, I was…. much earlier than that I was we're bidding on a proposal which some work right, which was the largest contract that our unit would have ever signed. And this isn't the Washington DC area, so at the time was a pretty big deal. And I was one of the leads and the other two I just thought the other two leads were just so much more polished. They do what they were talking about they have a confidence about them, and whoa you know, kind of this is really not what I know, but I’m going to fake it till you make it, and I was really worried I wasn't faking it well enough…But you know we won the contract and then I had to deliver on it. And the plan didn’t go exactly the way it should have gone.

But you know so we continue to run into challenges, because the plan was…one team was going to install Part A, and I was going to install Part B on top of Part A. It turned out that Part A had to be replaced in order for Part B to work. And that was told that we had… and there were seven locations and had to be deployed to and one part A, and they did kind of a staged appointment.

Right, but the idea was since we're building on top of Part A, we could do all Part B in one fell swoop. It made sense when you're conceptualizing the plan. In reality, it didn't work out that way that sounds replacing Part A. You had to come up with a plan that we could still do it, and still replaced the entire thing. But again, we got through it. But, you know, it's one of those things you just felt the edge of failure. Or you look over it's like “oh my God we can't do this” and you know I convince, you know, my leadership team at the time that we can do this, and they were extremely skeptical. But they didn't have a choice either, so we follow the plan and that worked. So I guess you know those challenges, you know, are making the successes so much better.

Right, and I think that a lot of people don't see that. I mean I see if that was some of my nephews, it's like they come to the edge and the fear overwhelms them and they don't want to take that step.

Interviewer: What about at your current company? Did anything…were there any times, where you felt like particularly emotional or yeah?

Participant: For this current company, now it is rolling off a project and I was brought on this kind of oversight. And when they said they didn't need me anymore, I felt like “well did I not provide the value that they expected?” Until I felt like yeah, I didn't deliver, but I did everything I could do in order to deliver the quality and you know what they…. What I thought they needed promise they didn't know what they needed, or they can like what I said they needed. So that was very stressful and disappointing. And you know, because it was also the end of a contract that was very lucrative for me personally.

Interviewer: You said you've been with this company for about five years now.

Participant: mm hmm (agree).

Interviewer: Did anything change during the pandemic, or because of the pandemic with your work setup or?

Participant: Well, one thing that changed is before the pandemic. We worked on site so when I traveled for one engagement to phoenix, you know, from the DC area for about six to eight months. That contract ended. Pandemic hit, so now I haven't travel for work since the pandemic. I haven't been on a plane for going on three years. So yeah, it has changed that way, but I think it's gotten more comfortable. You know, growing like a million-dollar project over video calls, which is kind of strange.

Interviewer: Is it your preference to be doing the work, remote or to be on site?

Participant: Yeah, personally I’d rather do it on sit although I find it more stressful. But at this point, I prefer remote work just because I could do other things. It's just easier kind of for my family life. You know, was the other non-work things I do. I think that's probably generally true. I don’t know.

Interviewer: Sure. In recent years, and especially with the pandemic there's maybe been an increase in anti-Asian violence that has been broadcast on the news and what’s that something that's affected you at all, emotionally or personally?

Participant: So not personally. Emotionally I think is very unfair, but it doesn't exactly at all by any means like…I guess, I still have kind of an insulated world. I haven't you know… I haven't been personally attacked or anything like that. I don't know of any individuals I know that have been affected directly. But go kind of…I know what happens. I believe it happens. It just hasn't affected me any significant level. But I do, you know, for what little it's worth you know, on social media, I kind of, you know, support stopping the hate right.

Interviewer: Sure, yeah on social media and what kinds of social media are you on?

Participant: Facebook. Sometimes I do Instagram. From a career perspective kind of like dead.

Interviewer: Amazing.

Participant: Pretty much it is.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything else about your workplace or that your job that we haven't discussed that you'd want to talk about?

Participant: I guess the one thing. At one point in my career, there was a consortium. Because when I was IBM and so GE and other fortune 100 fortune 50 companies that created kind of I doubted what it was called, but it was an Asian American kind of focus group. And I went to one of their conferences and I thought it was really good insofar as. So here is, you know, it's kind of funny right because you talk about not perpetuating stereotypes, but that was presented was here's a stereotypical image right, or profile, which you know, frankly, my transport it, so I thought it was spot on and then kind of here's what to do about it, but really kind of that awareness. Is something that I wish you know happen more often? And It's kind of interesting as my children, who are all in the workplace now. Yeah, they don't necessarily, at least they don't tell me that they aligned as being Asian. And that may be because they also grew up in kind of the suburban America world or be with a lot more diversity. They experienced more diversity growing up than I did. So, it's kind of…it's a from a career perspective would be had been nice to say okay well here's some of the things that make you unique and here's how you turn these things into strengths, or whatever right, but you know some kind of awareness. And I don't think those things should just be open to Asians, right? The ideas to share it somehow build a diversity campaign or a culture that supports diversity because, you know, in the practice areas I was in, as I said, those predominately white males, there are other practice areas that were not, right? And geographically speaking, as I said, California versus east coast. Or the type of service, right? Typically, in human resources and marketing, my observation is typically women, right? The technical and some of the strategic things, finance, are typically male. But yeah, I see some of that changing but it's still very small.

Interviewer: Sure

Participant: So, I’d say probably pushing diversity more Asian awareness programs, that's what I would suggest would be helpful.

Interviewer: Asian awareness programs for everybody, not just for Asians, it’s just what you're saying right?

Participant: Right.

Interviewer: When you talked about the stereotypical image that they were suggested, they were showing at this consortium that you joined, what was that?

Participant: You know just kind of the more introverted right. Kind of a…I don't know if they call it a family but kind of more of a social structure, which is more collaborative kind of, you know, a patriarchal or matriarchal structure versus a western civilization, civilization is more hierarchical. So if you just look at, you know, royalty, for example, right so it's a little bit different than that, and then you know how to take some of these perceptions and turn them into strengths, and all those things were but the idea was okay well if you know if you are introverted and you're not comfortable doing public speaking, well here's what you can do to overcome that great. That do the toastmasters thing. You know, whatever right? Get comfortable. You know practice makes you more comfortable. Exercise it. That sort of thing and then kind of creating forums right subgroups say okay well, if you want to talk to people who are interested in this. Here's what you can do. You know just to help build a network, because I can at least from me and probably for a small subset of people with my background, the family group was the primary structure. Right. For others, it's about people outside of them. So that's your friend’s network, your colleague’s network, and so there are these other things that people just naturally gravitate to. My suggested is because of my immigrant parents and grandparents, they want to keep the family together, so outsiders were threats. And whereas others who you know kind of it's about your friends. It's about the other people you know, and then you apply that in a business context and the relationships and how you develop those and sustain those. That's something that you're kind of in a family it's like well, that's kind of like an entitlement. You know you're expected to do that, you have to do that, as opposed to an optional thing. So, you have to develop skills in order to maintain that relationship well, both establish it and maintain it, so I think those are kind of two very different models, my view. So it also makes the family group more insular protected, as opposed to this one is like oh let's see what else I could discover. So that's all I had to learn in college, which I apparently learned some of it anyway.

Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds like you've been pretty successful so. Something you were doing with right.

Participant: Guess so.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you'd want to discuss?

Participant: No, I think that's about it either has this been helpful?

Interviewer: Yeah, very helpful here.

Participant: So, what is your timeline.

Interviewer: For interviews you mean or?

Participant: Yeah, I guess you're kind of in like survey data collection mode. Right so precise you know around some set of hypotheses.

Interviewer: So, I plan to interview through the end of summer and then. The bulk of my analysis will probably be in early fall. And then I’m going to try to write up results by winter. I’m supposed to present what I find. In maybe like February around that so.

Participant: What's the working hypothesis?

Interviewer: Well, so I try not to have too much of a hypothesis, because I don't want to like influence paint. I tried to just see what themes come out from the interviews. But yeah, some of the things that you hit upon are things that are our patterns that I’ve seen so far in terms of you know feeling like… observing that there was a pretty strong lack of diversity in the management sections of companies feeling like sometimes that did have something to do with, you know, being having a leadership model that was white male centered and not necessarily involving like an Asian image, for example.

Interviewer: Right.

Participant: Quite a few role models, I guess is.

Interviewer: That too. Yeah, that's something that people haven't talked about as much but yes, that too.

Participant: Yeah, how was it Obama named. You know the secretary. Now we can’t remember his name, energy Secretary anyway, that was a great thing cuz I was in the energy industry at the time, so that's kind of interesting. So, but yeah. I get that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, you can be a role model for the people that know you.

Participant: Yeah well, we'll see how that goes.

Interviewer: So much, I have some demographic questions for you. Let's see, can you tell me where you were born and grew up?

Participant: In Philadelphia Pennsylvania area.

Interviewer: Okay, okay. Gotcha.

Participant: Trigger that's close enough your kid actually need to tell me.

Interviewer: No, no yeah. What about… do you mind telling me your age?

Participant: 65.

Interviewer: And your ethnic background is Chinese.

Participant: Yes,

Interviewer: Okay. And oh, I’ve been asking people their gender pronouns. That's a new thing but…

Participant: Oh, he, him. I guess.

Interviewer: Cool.