Lessons Learned about Creating Inclusive Environments

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ACM's Approach

- ACM is a large international organization
  - 100,000 members spread across 190 countries
- Many programs to encourage & promote women, minorities, & other underrepresented groups
  - Also rely on our strategic partnerships with other groups, e.g.
    - Long time partner/funder of CRA grad cohorts & Taulbee Survey
    - Founding sponsor of Tapia Celebration
    - Co-founder of Grace Hopper Conference
    - Sponsor of some NCWIT programs

- Will show 3 "lessons learned" from our efforts to promote diversity and inclusion

ACM's Influence Must Be Indirect

- ACM isn't in a position to directly improve diversity
  - A professional society, with individual members
  - Membership, committee members, event attendees, volunteers, etc. are all self-selected
  - All public roles (e.g., speakers, editors, leaders) are selected by volunteers
  - Even awardees are selected by volunteers (drawing from public call for nominations)

- Therefore, we must focus on inclusion
  - Fostering environments and behaviors that welcome and embrace diversity
  - We target diversity of all types ("the usual", plus size/type of company or institution, stage in career, disciplinary interests…)

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Lesson 1: **Policies Aren't Enough**

- Policy & procedures are just the framework – there must be consequences
  - Consequences put muscle behind policies
  - Must be tailored to each policy's "sphere of influence"

- Example A: policy against harassment at ACM activities
  - Harassment defined very broadly as any abusive or hostile behavior
  - Applies to all activities (chapter meetings, conferences, committees,…)
  - Consequences are somewhat indirect and limited in scope: temporary or longer term ban from future participation in specific types of ACM activities

Policies Aren't Enough

- Example B: policy against coercion and "undue influence" in publication processes
  - Intent is to combat the kinds of biases and crony-ism possible in peer review
  - Here, consequences are more direct and can have career implications: removal of publication from Digital Library (with notation of removal), temporary or longer term ban from reviewing or even authorship

- Be prepared – adding consequences results in more complaints
  - Try to view it as evidence that people trust the policy & process

Lesson 2: Create Opportunities for Inclusion

- We try to structure new events/activities/awards so they demonstrate the importance of inclusion
  - Tried emphasizing "equity" (was misinterpreted by some)
  - Now we focus on demonstrating the value-add of having different perspectives and approaches

- In ACM's case, want to expose more techies to the synergies achieved by working with people from other backgrounds & experiences, e.g.,
  - Webinars and symposia that mix "traditional" techies with people who apply computing technology in other fields
  - Committees and activities that deliberately mix people from different regions, different sizes and types of companies/institutions, different stages in career…

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Lesson 3: Show How to Be a "Good Ally"

- Even "enlightened" people can be reluctant to speak out when someone exhibits inappropriate behavior
  - Typical leader takes the person aside privately afterward
  - At best, that will help them change – but to others it comes across as tolerance (or even agreement) with the behavior
- Top-ranking person present can take responsibility to "call out" the behavior in front of the group
  - Can be gentle but firm: "You seem to have picked up on X's idea - does that mean you think it's worth pursuing?" "Did you mean to be negative about X, or did it just come across that way?"
- Doing it in the group setting
  - Shows that leadership will not tolerate the behavior
  - Shows others what they can do when they see bad behavior

Recap

- As with so many things, creating more inclusive environments requires clear, decisive leadership

- Key lessons we've learned:
  - Policies that aren't enforced won't be taken seriously
  - Inclusion doesn't just happen – must create opportunities for demonstrating the value it adds
  - Change must be "by example" – can't expect others to change unless leaders demonstrate that they have changed