

UPWARD MOBILITY IN STATE GOVERNMENT

BY CARLENE JACKSON

In 1972, Oregon, like other state governments, found itself actively in the business of implementing equal employment opportunity laws and affirmative action regulations. It was at this time that the EEO Act of 1972 amended existing legislation to include state and local governments. States found themselves concerned with all aspects of affirmative action programming including outreach recruitment, selection, placement, training, and upward mobility.

Until recently, many state governments have not emphasized the upward mobility phase of affirmative action. Their major efforts have been concentrated in the areas of outreach recruitment and employee selection. However, the federal government has been in the upward mobility business for a number of years.

In 1969, the chairman of the Civil Service Commission reported to President Nixon that "despite significant gains in overall employment of minority group persons in

federal service, too many of our minority employees are concentrated at lower grade levels. . . . Our women employees are also largely concentrated in the lower grade levels." As a result, the President in Executive Order 11478 of August 8, 1969, directed agencies to "provide the maximum feasible opportunity to employees to enhance their skills so they may perform at their highest potential and advance in accordance with their abilities."

Pressures to implement upward mobility programs at the state level have come from a variety of sources. Minority groups and women organizations have been extremely vocal in their demands for the establishment of career opportunities and employee-development programs in both public and private institutions.

In early 1975, Oregon began to respond to these concerns and became one of the first states to initiate a comprehensive upward mobility program. The Executive Department Personnel Division assigned the task of designing a statewide upward mobility sys-

tems model to the Staff Development and Training Unit.

The Training Unit theorized that a sound upward mobility program would have to emphasize both employee development and changes within the system. Research was conducted through contacts with several state governments. It was found that some states looked upon upward mobility as an employee problem. They emphasized the necessity to change the employee's attitude, self-image, and self-awareness through motivational and assertiveness-skills development training programs. Other states emphasized the need for personnel system changes. This included the elimination of dead-ended positions and inflated minimum qualifications. Personnel handbooks were made available to all their state employees. These books provided information on such things as career ladders and lattices, revised minimum qualifications, restructured jobs, and step-by-step directions on how to get a job or promotion in state government. The federal government took a different approach by

identifying all of the major components of a successful upward mobility program, but there was no evidence of a systems model that could be adapted to state or local government needs.

It was apparent that there was a need to develop a systems approach to upward mobility. In an attempt to do just that, Oregon decided to conduct a pilot project in one of its state agencies. The experiences and information gained in this pilot would be the basis for an upward mobility systems model and would be used to train other state agencies in upward mobility planning and implementation. A \$4,000 Intergovernmental Personnel Act grant was secured to cover consultant fees, research materials, travel expenses, and special training costs.

The pilot agency chosen for the project was Worker's Compensation Department.* Worker's Compensation Department was an agency of about 450 employees.

Their top management was committed to equal employment opportunity, and the agency had quite a successful affirmative action track record. This combination made the agency an ideal candidate for an upward mobility pilot program.

The pilot program at Worker's Compensation Department consisted of five phases:

- Phase I - The Employer
- Phase II - The Employees
- Phase III - The Supervisors
- Phase IV - The Personnel System
- Phase V - Evaluation

Phase I - The Employer

Initially, efforts were made to determine the agency's overall upward mobility policy. How willing were they to help interested employees prepare for projected vacancies? To what extent would projected vacancies be filled through internal selection? How willing would the agency be to

review minimum qualifications for job validity, to restructure jobs, and to establish bridge positions and cross-over training programs?

What followed was a comprehensive process of data collection and analysis. The agency was asked to assess its manpower needs over the next two years. This projection included new positions, as well as anticipated vacancies from retirement and regular turnover. Other data collected and analyzed included recent personnel changes, promotions, existing career-counseling programs, performance appraisals, affirmative action plan, and various employee statistical data by race, sex, age, salary range, classification, number of years in the agency, etc.

The agency had an Education Committee responsible for reviewing training requests and developing agency training policy. Members of this committee were the agency's assistant administrator, personnel officer, training officer, two supervisors, and the agency's employee-union representative. In the initial stages of the upward mobility project, this committee served as liaison between the agency and the Personnel Division Training Unit. However, as the project progressed, the Committee became a vital component in the process of implementing the upward mobility project. It was this committee that determined the activities for the employees participating in the program and set the policy and direction for the project.

Phase II - The Employees

Statistical data was gathered on all employees at Worker's Compensation Department. A personnel cone was designed using the salary ranges of male and female employees. It was quite evident that the males dominated the higher ranges while female employees were concentrated in the lower ranges. The agency's extensive outreach recruitment for mi-

*Prior to July 1, 1977, the agency was known as the Workman's Compensation Board.

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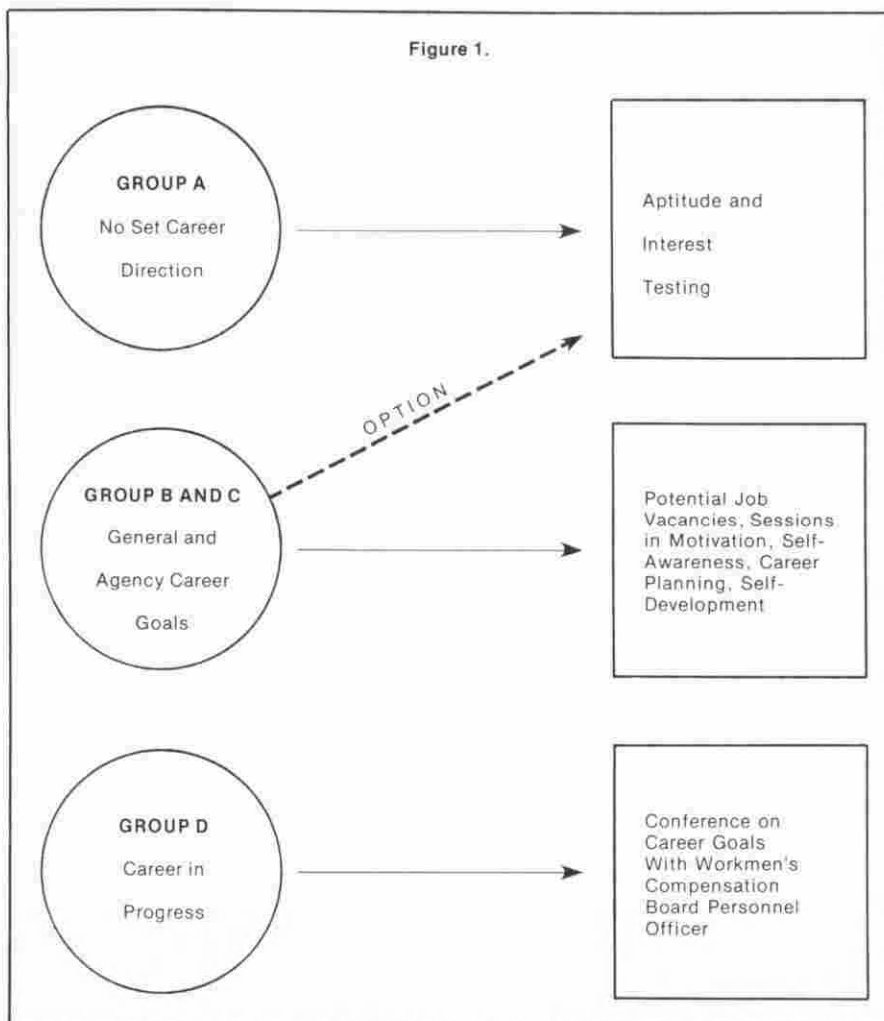
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Figure 1.



norities resulted in a much higher percentage of minority employees in upper salary ranges than was expected.

The next step was to determine the employees' career interests and goals. A comprehensive questionnaire was designed and distributed to 360 employees from salary ranges 1 to 22. Classifications above salary range 22 were primarily legal, medical or paramedical where selection standards were set outside the agency. One hundred and eighty employees returned the questionnaire (50 per cent) with 134 interested candidates (34 per cent).

The questionnaire was designed to help interested upward mobility candidates begin thinking about their career goals, aspirations, interests and skills. Candidates were asked to examine their preferences as they related to the world of work involving data, people and things.

After analyzing the returned questionnaires, the Education

Committee assigned candidates to one of several categories. The Committee's decisions were verified through a candidate self-placement process. Corresponding activities were planned for each group (Figure 1).

Candidates who did not know the direction or career field they wished to pursue were placed in Group A. The Education Committee decided to provide Group A candidates aptitude and interest testing and career counseling. The Oregon State Employment Division Research Section had designed a comprehensive aptitude and interest assessment program called SEARCH (Systems Exploration and Research for Career Help). SEARCH is a method of combining two separate assessment devices (aptitude and interest) with a job-classification system to provide the employee with information on job exploration. Group A respondents were scheduled to go through this SEARCH program.

Candidates who had broad car-

eer goals in mind that were not specific to Worker's Compensation Department positions were placed in Group B. These candidates appeared to lack motivation, self-confidence and direction. The Education Committee decided to provide Group B respondents with basic career counseling and career self-development training. Those who were interested could also attend the SEARCH sessions.

Candidates who had specific career goals within the Worker's Compensation Department were placed in Group C. Candidates in this group also appeared to lack self-confidence, initiative and motivation. Group C candidates were permitted to attend the career and self-development training sessions and the SEARCH testing program.

Members of the Education Committee were trained in the techniques of career counseling and provided career counseling to candidates in Groups B and C. During these sessions, counselors assisted employees in completing individual development plans. These plans were then submitted to the personnel office and the employee's immediate supervisor. Specific career goals were then written into the employee's work plan.

Candidates who were already quite well-established down their career path at the Worker's Compensation Department were placed in Group D. These candidates primarily needed adequate experience at each step in order to qualify for the next job level in their career plan. They also appeared to need reassurance that the agency did realize their career desires and was interested in their career advancement within the agency. There was evidence that some candidates in this group were not aware of the system barriers which might affect their career path. The Education Committee decided to provide Group D candidates the opportunity to schedule appointments to discuss and clarify their career plans with Nat Whisenant, the agency's personnel officer.

Phase III - The Supervisors

Gaining supervisory support early in the program was vitally

important. Much of the success of any upward mobility program lies in the amount of support, assistance and encouragement the supervisor provides the upward mobility candidate.

Briefings and progress reports were presented to supervisors and

managers at all levels of the Department. Several of the agency's supervisors actively participated in the program by attending some of the sessions with their employees and discussing the various activities in which candidates were involved. Those interested super-

visors also provided follow-up activities for their employees such as temporary assignments, special projects, outside training, etc.

Although the Worker's Compensation Department chose not to do so at this time, it was recommended that all agency supervisors receive training in techniques of career counseling. Employee development is a critical function of managers and supervisors. It is the responsibility and role of the supervisors to provide career counseling to their employees and to arrange necessary training and development opportunities for them.

Phase IV - The Personnel System

A private consultant was hired to examine the personnel system and make recommendation for systems changes essential in implementing an effective upward mobility program.

A comprehensive systems analysis was conducted within the Agency's Compliance Division. Existing staff patterns and position classifications were examined in depth. The objective was to update the minimum qualifications, eliminate dead-ended positions, restructure jobs, and develop bridge positions in an effort to design sound career ladders and lattices throughout the Division. A series of meetings were held with employees and managers at all levels. Questions continually asked dealt with the feasibility of changes in workflow assignments, minimum qualifications, promotional routes, training options, etc. All job descriptions were reviewed by function and by unit. Organizational charts were examined and re-examined.

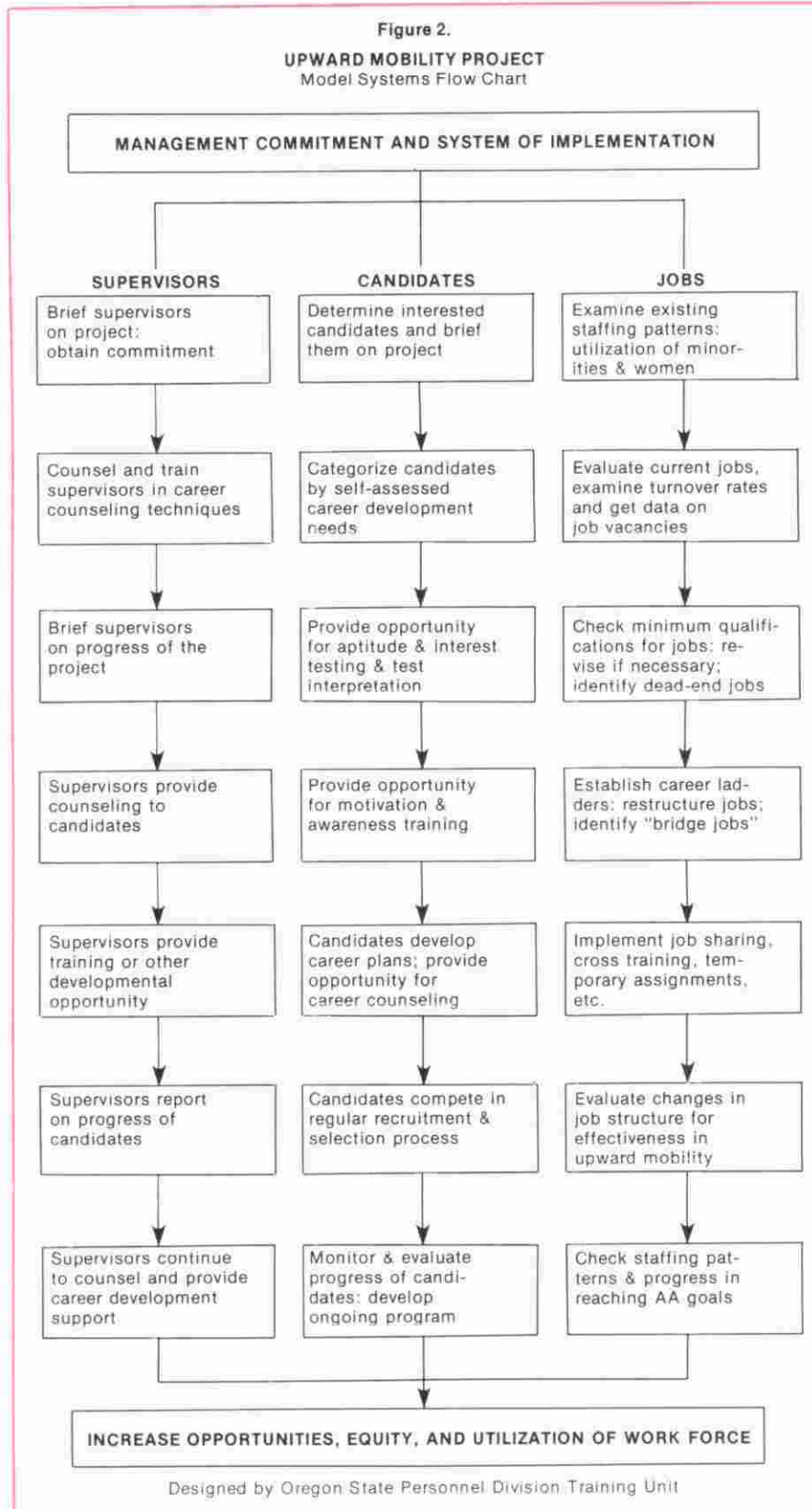
The final proposal included recommendations for the following:

- organizational changes and proposed job progressions or career ladders,
- budgetary justifications and agency funding approval,
- short and long-term implementation plans and procedures for necessary systems changes.

Phase V - Evaluation

Participants evaluated each phase of the project. Question-

Figure 2.
UPWARD MOBILITY PROJECT
Model Systems Flow Chart



naires were distributed through the agency's personnel office. Verbal feedback was received from participants and other employees at Worker's Compensation Department. This information was then shared and analyzed at periodic meetings with the Education Committee.

A final evaluation form was distributed to all candidates. Over 75 per cent of the respondents felt that the project had met or exceeded their expectations. One of the most frequent comments made by participants was their pleasure over the fact that the agency was beginning to show some interest in the employees and their individual career development.

The Worker's Compensation Department decided that upward mobility would be an ongoing program in their agency. Selection of new candidates would be conducted on a yearly basis. The Agency decided to design and distribute to all employees a brochure outlining the major components of the

Worker's Compensation Department Upward Mobility Program.

The Systems Model

A model was constructed based on the experiences learned from the Upward Mobility Pilot Project (Figure 2).

This model combined three primary components necessary in an effective upward mobility program: supervisors or management; candidates or employees; jobs or the system.

The Personnel Division's Staff Development and Training Unit designed, coordinated and conducted a series of training sessions for state training officers, personnel officers, and affirmative action officers. The Upward Mobility Systems Model provided the basis for the training program design. The objective of the training sessions was to provide other state agencies with enough direction and information, as a result of the pilot project experience, to effectively implement this or a modified upward mobility program state-

wide.

A 97-page comprehensive report on the Upward Mobility Pilot Project was written and distributed to all state agencies. Those interested in more detailed information about this project should contact: Oregon Executive Department, Personnel Division Training Unit, 1158 Chemeketa Street N.E., Salem, OR 97310.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Oregon's Upward Mobility Program has received "Best in the Nation" project awards from the International Personnel Management Association and the American Society of Public Administration.

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