

Upgrading the Disadvantaged*

identification of promotion characteristics which can lead to more open job mobility systems

G. Russell Barber, Jr.
William R. Schriver
Gary G. Kaufman
Thomas E. Cressler

American industry has devoted considerable energy to the equitable employment of disadvantaged groups in the recent past, primarily as a result of attitudinal changes in society as reflected in legislation. This is not to imply that forces for change have not also come from within business through such programs as the JOBS activity of NAB and through the many individual employers' decisions that mirror larger societal change.

Equitable employment opportunities may be offered to the disadvantaged, minorities, and women either by recruiting from the external labor market and placing them directly in jobs that traditionally excluded them or by upgrading them into these jobs from the jobs within the firm. In either case, the old barriers that restricted the upward movement of disadvantaged, blacks and women without regard to their economic potential to the firm would be struck down and individuals would be free to realize their economic potential in a competitive market.

Cultural Effects Persist

The above proposition, however, presupposes that pre-employment discrimination effects may be as efficiently mandated against as the post-employment effects. Even though strong governmental efforts are closing the educational gap between disadvantaged blacks and whites, residual cultural effects may persist that bias occupational aspiration and selection. Among women, the socialization process prior to entry into the labor force and the expected dual family roles frequently militate against economically maximizing earned income or income-producing behavior in the world of work.

In order to efficiently upgrade the disadvantaged, minority, and women into skilled jobs the em-

ployer cannot rely on the traditional methods of selection and training. There are three general reasons why typical selection devices for promotion or entry into training programs that lead to promotion have been biased against the disadvantaged, minorities, and women.

Not "Culture Fair"

First, job entry examinations tend not to be "culture fair." For example, Negroes frequently have verbal and conceptual differences resulting from inferior educational and certainly different cultural experiences that do not foster competition and aspiration. Added to this is the employer's tendency to seek the highest qualified persons for jobs that could have been filled by persons with fewer credentials. (This behavior is uneconomical for the employer because he must pay more for better qualified but no more productive employees.) This barrier has been at least partially eliminated by the United States Supreme Court's decision in the Griggs v. Duke Power Company case where the Court ruled that an employer was prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 from requiring a high school diploma or the passing of a general I.Q. test as an arbitrary condition of employment or transfer.

"Formerly Excluded" Blocks

A second and less apparent source of bias is ubiquitous in the whole promotion process. The disadvantaged, blacks, and women, due to differences in the earlier socialization process frequently will not apply for jobs from which they were formerly excluded by reason of race or sex. Then too, levels of motivation and aspiration tend to be limited as functions of their peer groups. That is, a black truck driver or woman secretary may consider him or her self and be considered by friends to be

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quite successful. On the other side of the coin, the supervisor may reinforce this pattern through what has been termed a Pygmalion complex, i.e., creating a protege in his preconceived image. Supervisors may expect foreman to be white (or in some cases black) high school graduates and executive secretaries to be middle-aged spinsters. They may expect "sir" instead of "man" and motivation to be internally supplied rather than externally.

A third source of bias against the promotion of the disadvantaged involves residual discriminatory employment patterns from the past that influence present employment conditions. Although the courts have held that present consequences of past discrimination are covered by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (See *United States v. Local 189, United Papermakers and Paperworks*, *Crown Zellerback, et al.* and *Quarles v. Phillip Morris, Inc.*); the vestiges are difficult to remove in the short-run. Collective bargaining agreements have frequently institutionalized bidding, transfer and job entry requirements that, while not unfairly discriminatory by intention, rest on a foundation of partitioned work forces with regard to sex and race. The forces that perpetuate this bias are covert and usually indirect or informal.

Subjective Differences Influence

The question that must be answered before "open job systems" can be established is to what extent are promotion (upgrading) criteria related to subjective differences in the earlier socialization process? (It is assumed that legislation prohibiting overt, unfair discrimination has been at least moderately successful in forbidding those activities.) Answers to this question could lead to the identification of specific training or counseling programs

that could further reduce upgrading barriers.

This article reports upon a part of an upgrading project funded by the Manpower Administration in a large chemical firm whose facilities, where the study was carried out, served as a major prime contractor for the Government. The article focuses upon the results of an interview procedure that was used to determine what supervisors looked for in recommending the upgrading of an employee into a higher level job. There is wide documentation that upgrading in operative, clerical and craft jobs is frequently based upon "objective" measures of present job performance and knowledge, willingness to undertake additional training, willingness to accept a more responsible job and finally the supervisor's recommendation which may include many and diverse subjective estimates. Whether or not these criteria have validity in predicting successful performance at higher levels and whether or not they may be reliably measured are open to some question.

The subject that will be addressed here is the identification of characteristics that were reported by supervisors to be the important determinants in promotional decisions affecting employees in operative, clerical and craft jobs. On the bases of these findings some specific policies will be presented and discussed that could hopefully accelerate the upgrading of disadvantaged workers.

800 Characteristics Identified

The managers discussed the 87 different jobs under their supervision (33 hourly, 30 weekly, and 24 monthly) and mentioned more than 800 different characteristics and qualifications affecting promotion and transfer decisions. However, a problem occurred with further analysis of such a large

amount of data. One is incapable of reading 800 statements, somehow cognitively assimilating them, and then producing accurate generalizations about the underlying factors which seem to influence promotion or transfer decisions.

To solve this problem, the investigators borrowed a technique from factor analytical research and developed a method to quantitatively organize the data. More specifically, each statement was transcribed on an index card and six judges independently sorted the cards into piles of statements which "seemed to go together."

Judgments Combined

These judgments were combined and the degree of agreement among the judges as to which statements "seemed to go together" with other statements was quantified by means of a direct analogue of McQuitty's Elementary Linkage Analysis. The analysis produced 10 clusters of statements which, in the opinion of our judges, described homogenous "dimensions" of qualities and characteristics affecting promotion and transfer decisions. The 10 dimensions were:

1. *Job knowledge and/or technical competence* was the most frequently mentioned area of interest to supervisors. Supervisors were interested in demonstrated ability to perform job related tasks in a manner that would require little instruction or constant supervision. Included in the dimension were items like efficiency and effectiveness in completing assignments; thorough knowledge of standards applicable to the work; alertness to errors in work; ability to see relationships in and between work related items.

2. *Dependability, reliability, and attendance* were felt to be important in insuring that the work would be done. Supervisors were concerned about being able to rely on the employee to do his work on time and to be able to rely on what the employee said he would do.

3. *Ability to get along with people* was seen as a major consideration in filling a job opening. Supervisors were concerned with how well the employee could get along with both his peers and his supervisors. Little mention was made of subordinates because the jobs discussed were always filled by employees with little opportunity for supervision.

4. *Ability to communicate* was important in all jobs and usually involved both written and verbal forms of communication. Not only did supervisors distinguish between these two basic forms of communication, but they also showed concern for the structuring of written material.

5. *Education* was identified as being important and refers to the formal education an employee has had. Supervisors appeared to use education as a screening device which could eliminate those with a high likelihood of failure.

6. *Past experience* was viewed as being important in two ways. First, supervisors were concerned with an employee's past jobs with tasks similar to those of the job to be filled.

Second, the supervisors were interested in how well the employee had performed in these previous jobs. Supervisors did not rely upon the employee's report of past performance but instead used ratings and other support information from previous employers and instructors.

7. *Initiative, ambition, and industriousness* were qualities viewed as important and were estimated from what the employee had done on last job. These qualities were indicated by an employee starting work on his own, solving some problems on his own, suggesting improvements, staying until the work was done, and taking action to improve himself.

8. *Leadership or supervisory ability* was important when the job to be filled required supervisory or straw boss type activity. Because most employees did not have an opportunity to exhibit supervisory ability fully, part measures were used to estimate ability. Some of these part measures included forcefulness, courage to correct mistakes of others, and ability to organize own work. When available, information from an assessment center for supervisory skills was used.

9. *Cooperative and follows instructions* was primarily a concern of the supervisor about the difficulty he might experience with an employee when orders were given and when the employee had to work with others. (This dimension is almost a "don't rock the boat" consideration.)

10. *Good attitude toward work and the job* was viewed as being important and is much like initiative and industriousness (No. 7), except that this dimension included attitudinal aspects only of the behavior. In other words, the supervisors viewed expressed attitudes toward the job and work as being important independently of how the job was subsequently performed.

On the basis of these findings the investigators believe that the linkage analysis technique, applied to the considered opinions of the management of any organization of 100 or more employees, shows considerable promise in the investigation of existing promotional criteria. The analysis should provide

a descriptive documentation of what factors are considered important in promoting an individual.

Self-examination Urged

In turn this documentation should provide two valuable pieces of information. First, the management may use the information for self-examination of the existence of various subtle mechanisms by which the past tradition of job segregation, separate promotional lines, subcultural influences, and the like may irrelevantly affect a promotional decision.

Second, this documentation can inform employees of the behaviors, attitudes, and activities that tend to lead to increasing upgrading potential or actual promotion. The dissemination of this information to all employees is an important step in insuring that all employees, regardless of irrelevant environmental influences, have equal opportunity to be upgraded.

G. Russell Barber, Jr. received a B.A. from Occidental College, Los Angeles, an M.B.A. from Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., and is a doctoral candidate in economics at the University of Mississippi on a National Science Foundation scholarship.

William R. Schriver received a B.S., M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee and is director of the Center for Manpower Studies, Memphis State University — University of Mississippi.

Gary G. Kaufman received a B.S. and Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee and is an industrial psychologist.

Thomas E. Cressler is a personnel research specialist and received a B.S. from the University of South Florida, and an M.S. from the University of Tennessee where he has also completed all course work for the DBA.

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