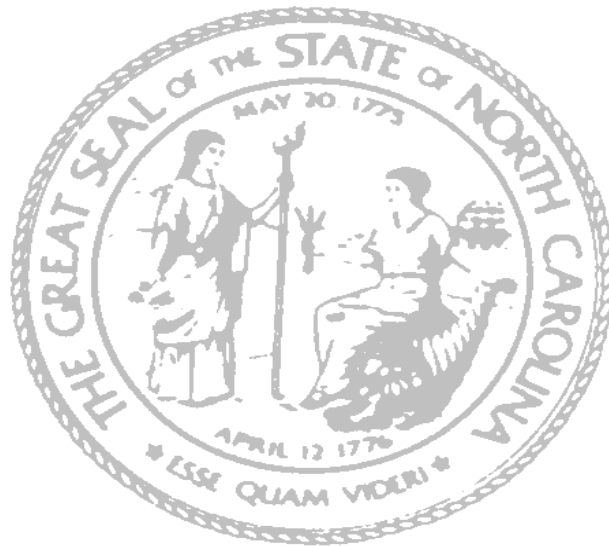


Special Emphasis Project:

African American Males and Employment in North Carolina State Government

Project Report



NC Office of State Personnel
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Section I: Introduction

Review of Project

North Carolina State Government is committed to providing a workplace that is free from discrimination and fair and equitable for all employees. The North Carolina Office of State Personnel (OSP) supports the maintenance of this work environment through consultation, policy development, and research initiatives. Throughout the late 1990's, several unfavorable employee trends were identified by OSP in relation to African American male employees. No conclusions have been drawn as to the cause of these trends. Some of these trends included:

- African American males had the lowest percentage of workforce representation of the four major demographic groups (white males, white females, African American males, and African American females), representing 12.2% of the entire state government workforce as of December 31, 1999. In addition, African American males represented only 6.1% of the Management Related and 6.7% of the Professional occupational categories.
- African American males had the highest percentage of representation in the lowest salary grades (50-54). Approximately one quarter of all African American male employees were represented in the lowest salary grades.
- African American males had the highest percentage of disciplinary actions of the four major demographic groups. African American males accounted for 31% of all disciplinary actions in calendar year 1999. Of these disciplinary actions, 14.5% resulted in dismissals. This is the highest percentage of dismissal of the four major demographic groups.
- A review of performance management (PM) data for Cycles 3-11 (1991-99) revealed that African American males were the only race-gender group to have a disparity from the highest PM rating group in every Cycle since 1992. African American males, as a race-gender group, have consistently received the lowest PM ratings between 1991 through 1999.

These trends warranted a separate evaluation of the data in order to develop conclusions and recommendations for action.

This project report provides an overview of the research that was conducted in relationship to African American male employees within North Carolina State Government. The research spanned three years, including the completion of quantitative data analysis and qualitative analysis (employee focus groups, supervisor focus groups, and facilitator focus groups).

Section II: Quantitative Analysis

Original Report (May, 2000)

Several descriptive data reports (EEO Status, Personnel Function- SB886, Performance Management) produced by the Office of State Personnel indicated that African American male employees within North Carolina State Government were not reaching full workforce representation levels and were also experiencing unfavorable trends in the performance management and disciplinary arenas.

Findings: Despite progress in workforce representation levels, African American male employees still faced tangible obstacles, particularly in the disciplinary and performance management areas. This analysis concluded that African American male employees were more likely than any other demographic group to receive disciplinary action and lower performance management ratings. It was difficult for this analysis to determine a causal relationship between the unfavorable trends in these specific personnel functions and race/gender groups. However, regardless of cause, the trends themselves are indisputable and are not effected by salary grade or education level. Thus, there was value in crafting a response to this data in the disciplinary and performance management arenas.

Agency and University Analysis

A study committee evaluated the relationship of African American male employees to pay grade, performance management rating, disciplinary action, and promotion for individual agencies and universities. The agency analysis was limited to the seventeen- (17) agencies that had 200 or more employees as of December 31, 1999. The university analysis included all 16 universities within the UNC system plus UNC General Administration and the N.C. School of Science and Math.

Findings: The research determined the correlation between the specified personnel functions and agencies/universities within the research population. A positive correlation means that something is more likely to occur or occur at a higher level. For instance, in Table 1, a positive correlation indicates that African American male employees at 5 agencies are more likely to receive disciplinary action. A negative correlation means that something is less likely to occur or occur at a lower level. The chart details the findings:

TABLE 1: Agencies by Function and Correlation

	Disciplinary	Pay Grade	PM Rating	Promotion
Positive Correlation	5 Agencies *	1 Agency	None	1 Agency
No Correlation	12 Agencies	10 Agencies	5 Agencies	13 Agencies
Negative Correlation	None	6 Agencies *	12 Agencies *	3 Agencies *

* Area of Concern

TABLE 2: Universities by Function and Correlation

	Disciplinary	Pay Grade	PM Rating	Promotion
Positive Correlation	5 Universities *	1 University	None	None
No Correlation	13 Universities	8 Universities	3 Universities	18 Universities
Negative Correlation	None	9 Universities *	15 Universities *	None

* Area of Concern

Recommendations (presented to State Personnel Commission 12/2000)

The quantitative data revealed significant areas of concern for African American male employees in relation to disciplinary actions, pay grade, performance management ratings, and promotional opportunities within both an agency and university environment. It was recommended that additional data collection was necessary to further evaluate these trends. Specifically, the research committee was interested in collecting qualitative data from African American male employees and the supervisors of African American male employees. This data was used to evaluate African American male employee perceptions and experiences within the North Carolina State government workforce.

The research committee recommended utilizing employee focus groups as the qualitative data collection method. It was determined that $\frac{3}{4}$ of all African American male employees are employed in either the Department of Correction, Department of Health and Human Services, or the Department of Transportation. Specifically, North Carolina State government (Executive Branch) employed 8,835 African American male employees as of December 31, 1999. At this time, 6,822 African American male employees (or 77%) were employed at the Department of Correction, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Transportation. These agencies agreed to support the selection of a sampling of their African American male employees to participate in focus groups. These focus groups served as the foundation of the qualitative analysis.

Section III: Focus Group Discussions (Employee, Supervisor, and Facilitator)

Methodology

By design, focus group discussions generate qualitative data. This research method was used to obtain more holistic insight into the employment of African American males in order to understand the typical work experience, the quality of the experience of African American males, and the perspectives of supervisors of African American males in the three participating agencies.

While the experiences reported by African American males might be similar to the employment experiences of African American males as well as other demographic groups, the findings in the employee focus groups *should only be attributed specifically* to the employment experience of African American males in these three agencies. However, the facilitator focus groups were representative of employees from throughout state government and those findings could be generalized to a larger employee population. While any one statement made by participants may be refuted or discounted, the true utility of qualitative data comes in listening to the prevailing themes and the directions the majority of the reports and statements point us to. Although some readers may disagree with the thoughts and opinions expressed by the participants, they must respect their perspective and remember that participants have described their employment experience as they see and live it. The identity of the focus group participants was held in the strictest confidence throughout the sampling and focus group activities.

- **Employees:** The input from African American males were gathered in 18 discussion groups held in 13 locations from February 18 - March 6, 2002. The discussion facilitators/leaders were African American males that volunteered for the project. While most of these facilitators/leaders were state employees, none worked in the three partnering agencies. A total of 130 African American males participated in a focus group discussion from a sampling of 250 African American males selected. This represents 52% of the African American males available from the sample. An OSP human resource associate assigned participants to a focus group location and made all contacts and meeting arrangements.
- **Supervisors:** The data from supervisors of African American males were gathered in six groups and locations from February 19 - February 27, 2002. Of the 100 individuals selected for the sample, 74 (74%) were available. Participation was voluntary and subject to the supervisors' availability according to regular duties and obligations. A total of 42 supervisors of African American males or 57% of the available supervisors participated in the focus groups.
- **Employee Facilitators:** Twenty-six (current or former) professional African American males from departments other than Correction, Transportation, and Health and Human Services served as facilitators for the African American Male employee focus group sessions. All facilitators were interviewed and assessed to determine their skills and experience in providing facilitation services. A four-hour orientation/training was conducted for the facilitators on January 23, 2002. This orientation was designed to familiarize the facilitators with the Special Emphasis Project, the facilitator's role and tools, and focus group processes. On May 1, 2002, after the focus groups were complete, a feedback session was conducted for employee facilitators. The information gathered during these sessions represents the experiences that the facilitators have had as African American males working in state government.
- **Supervisor Facilitators:** Eight demographically diverse employees from departments other than Correction, Transportation, and Health and Human Services served as facilitators during the focus groups for the supervisors of African American Male employees. All facilitators were interviewed and assessed to determine their skills and experience in providing facilitation services. A four-hour orientation/training was conducted for the facilitators on January 25, 2002. This orientation was designed to familiarize the facilitators with the Special Emphasis Project, the facilitator's role and tools, and focus group processes. On May 15, 2002, after the focus groups were complete, a feedback session was conducted for supervisor facilitators.

Summary of Focus Group Discussions

The following represents a summary of statements from the focus group discussion data. The data were analyzed from two viewpoints: by question or issue across all locations and by geographic location/region. Although the specific words used from one African American male or one supervisor to the next were not necessarily the same, all statements were read and re-read to obtain their true meaning or belief and then categorized accordingly.

1. Compensation and recognition do not increase regardless of how hard African American male employees work.

2. African American male employees are often called upon to solve problems that others can't or won't and then are not compensated or recognized for doing a good job.
3. If African American males are ambitious, supervisors will cut off opportunities and control access to information and resources.
4. The performance evaluation and assessment process does not take into account all that employees contribute to operations and is based on subjective views that go unchallenged.
5. Extreme disciplinary action is taken against African American males for events where others get lesser sanctions.
6. Most African American males reported feeling that they have suffered unfair and disparate treatment, reduced opportunity for advancement and inconsistent communication. Further, it appears that there is distrust of supervisors and the management.
7. Hiring and promotion and the way these programs are administered in these three agencies were primary areas where African American males described disparate treatment. Further, African American males have described areas where increased knowledge and understanding of culture, supervision of diverse groups, and communication skills for supervisors would improve their work experiences.
8. African American males appear to believe that their pay and compensation are not equitable when compared to that of non-African Americans. Further, African American males believe that they are hired into cluster positions at the lower end of the pay system.
9. According to these reports, performance evaluation ratings may not accurately reflect the quality and quantity of work but may be a function of the worker's relationship and similarity to the supervisor making the assessment.
10. African American males believe there is sometimes reviewer bias, that the current performance review processes do not accurately measure the specific kind of work they perform, and that supervisors and managers could benefit from additional development and training in conducting performance reviews.
11. African American males reported many instances where second and third chances were provided to whites but believe that second and third chances are not given to African American males.
12. Participants report a difference in the frequency and discipline level given to females versus males. Females are disciplined less often and with milder punishments. African American males believe that the disciplinary process as administered in these three agencies is used specifically to either remove African American males from employment or to control African American males.
13. African American males in these three agencies report they believe that two systems exist in state government employment--one for whites and females and another for African Americans and males. Participants reported hierarchical strata that give preference first to white males, then to white females and last to African American males.
14. African American males believe that it is hard to get into higher level positions and even

harder to retain them. Several reasons were given: double standards in hiring practices, the "good old boy" network system, whites do not want to work with African American males, "it's who you know" and "politics". Participants believe that the views of older African American males are very different from the views of younger African American males. African American males believe that increased efforts to hire and retain African American males in higher pay grades/bands are needed.

Focus Group Recommendations

The following represents recommendations from the focus group participants. As with the summary statements, researchers examined common themes, patterns, and similarities from the focus group feedback to develop the recommendations. Patterns of experience or recurring experiences were instrumental in developing the recommendations.

1. More African American males are needed in State government in high level positions.
2. Personnel offices should become independent from the department's administration in order to be more fair and equitable to all employees.
3. Use information from this process to develop initiatives to address concerns. Identify champions of diversity.
4. Institute a monitoring/evaluation process for employment practices.
5. Select departments in addition to the three participating in the focus groups to pilot new programs or initiatives.
6. Expand recruitment, retention, career development and promotional efforts.
7. Managers need to develop a career development plan for all employees.
8. Mentoring opportunities and more African American males in management and supervisory roles may yield positive results--greater trust, and increased opportunities for all employees to make a greater contribution to the work carried out in these three agencies.
9. A review of current practices in recruitment and selection processes is needed to ensure effectiveness and fairness. This review, also, will help to determine whether hiring and promotion opportunities for African American males in upper salary levels (above pay grade 75) have been systemically limited or whether hiring/promotion practices and strategies should be changed. African American male employees recommended that there be greater accountability for management and supervisors.
10. Design and offer training and education opportunities on topics such as managing and supervising diverse cultures, performance evaluation, recruitment/selection, and effective communication for managers and supervisors in the three agencies.
11. Conduct a study (using correlation analyses) of the salaries allocated in the three agencies to identify any possible relationships between pay and race/ethnicity, years of service, job assignments, education, and supervisor assignment.

12. Conduct a study of internal pay equity within large divisions/sections in the three agencies to determine if pay inequity resides at the micro levels of the organization.
13. A review of the documentation and process used by supervisors in the three agencies may be warranted to insure that managers and supervisors are using best practices when conducting/administering performance evaluations of all employees. This review may warrant new and specifically designed training/education for managers and supervisors to ensure that they are in compliance with policies and requirements in this area. This training should address cultural issues, supervisor's performance. Administration of the performance management programs should have increased oversight and coaching from the human resource staff.
14. Explore the possibility of removing "excellent or outstanding" and replace them with "very good" as the highest evaluation rating possible. Some jobs may not have enough variety to warrant more than a three choice evaluation rating scale.
15. The majority of the participants believe that their experience and knowledge of the disciplinary process causes them to feel that the process is unfair when applied to African American male employees. According to these reports, the way discipline is administered among the three agencies is a concern. Review the disciplinary process to determine if there is a difference in the way discipline is administered for comparable offenses and conduct.
16. The majority of the comments on promotions appear to point out the need for external assessment and guidance in the area of providing promotional career advancement opportunities. Therefore, this recommendation is offered. OSP needs to review and revise where appropriate, promotion policies. Also, promotional practices should be reviewed for consistent application within departments.
17. Target recruitment efforts to attract African American males to state government.
18. Develop training programs to provide support group for employees entering the work force. These training programs should provide skill development in three areas: communication, interpersonal and career advancement strategy.

Section IV: Project Conclusion and Potential Initiatives

Project Conclusion

The recommendations offered from the focus groups provide a foundation for the development of future initiatives to address concerns and issues identified in the quantitative and qualitative data. Initially, the policies, procedures, and programs developed from these recommendations should be implemented as pilot programs within pilot agencies. Those policies, procedures, and programs that are proven effective can be expanded statewide. Pilots programs can be developed from the potential future initiatives.

Potential Future Initiatives:

The following represent potential initiatives that may serve as pilots:

1. Develop a mentoring program for African-American male employees.
2. Expand recruitment efforts to target African-American male employees for high level occupations.
3. Review performance management processes and documentation to determine if managers and supervisors are conducting performance evaluations in compliance with established policy.
4. Explore the development of a performance management system which considers occupational variations.
5. Review the promotional policies and practices for consistent application.
6. Review the disciplinary process to determine if differences occur in the way discipline is awarded for comparable offenses.
7. Design training programs for managers and supervisors to include information on cultural issues, communication, and career development.
8. Design training programs to assist young employees with career development strategies, communication, and interpersonal skills.
9. Conduct a study using correlation analysis of the salaries allocated to employees to identify any possible relationships between pay and race/ethnicity, years of service, job assignments, education, and supervisor assignment.

These particular initiatives will be available for all departments and universities that are interested in participating in any potential pilots.

African American male employees in the focus groups reported that they are being treated inequitably. The perceptions that African American male employees are experiencing unfavorable employment trends in relationship to discipline, performance management, pay grade, and promotional opportunities are reflected in both the conclusions and recommendations from the focus groups. African American male focus group participants are cognizant of these issues and perceive inequity as the primary cause of these trends. The conclusions and recommendations contained in this report reflect experiences reported from various focus groups and have not been independently verified by the Office of State Personnel. However, this is an excellent opportunity for North Carolina to be a leader and address the potential initiative recommendations of the project advisory committee.

Special Emphasis Project Advisory Committee

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