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Ensuring Employment Equity: Are Federal Diversity Programs Making a Difference?

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ABSTRACT

In the last two decades, many public sector agencies have instituted a wide array of “managing diversity” programs designed to remove barriers to the full participation of women and people of color. Meanwhile, agencies are also increasingly responding to pressure to develop measures to monitor performance of all of their programs. Yet there have been few efforts in place to measure the effectiveness of diversity management programs. This article argues that such an evaluation is essential, and offers a preliminary governmentwide estimation of the success federal agencies have had in breaking down these barriers. We found, for the most part, that there is little evidence that broad-based diversity programs, nor any of their programmatic components, have created a more equitable work environment for

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women or people of color. We then examine the programs at two federal agencies with significant diversity efforts, in depth, and find again that the results have been mixed. While not meant to be the final word, we suggest that these findings can serve as the basis for generating greater discussion and analysis of these important, but under-evaluated, programs.

Key Words: Diversity; Performance measurement; Evaluation; Human resources management; Affirmative action; Civil service.

Since the term was coined by R. Roosevelt Thomas in 1990,^[1] many public sector agencies have joined the growing movement to learn how to “manage diversity” within their workforces. These efforts include a variety of strategies and tactics designed to break barriers to the full participation of women and people of color (and sometimes others) in the workplace with the ultimate goal of increasing organizational effectiveness. According to a survey administered to 160 federal agencies and subagencies, by 1999, nearly all (88%) had such programs in place.^[2]

Following passage of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), federal agencies have been required to develop measures to monitor the performance of their programs. Yet few have any significant effort in place to evaluate the extent to which their diversity efforts are succeeding in removing obstacles to the inclusion of people of color and women. The purpose of this article is to argue that such an evaluation is essential, and to offer a preliminary estimation of these programs on a governmentwide basis. The evaluation is based on data from the 1999 survey and from the Office of Personnel Management’s Central Personnel Data File (CPDF). We then suggest how individual organizations may also assess the effectiveness of their own programs. Before doing so, we provide some background on the history and development of the managing diversity movement.

THE DIVERSITY IMPERATIVE

The recent focus on the need to manage diversity is often attributed to the publication of two reports by the Hudson Institute in the late 1980s.^[3,4] These reports highlighted the increasing penetration of the national labor force by women and people of color. They warned that workplace policies adopted when the workforce was more homogeneous would fail in light of this increasing diversity. Although it turned out to be erroneous, one of the most widely quoted findings in the 1987 report, *Workforce 2000* was that “Only 15% of the new entrants to the labor force over the next 13 years will be native white males” (Ref.^[4], p. xiii). The report went on to note that the growing





presence of women in the labor force, for example, would require employers to offer flexible work schedules and arrangements so that women could continue to care for their children while devoting themselves to their careers. Moreover, the report warned, “[minorities] may have language, attitude, and cultural problems that prevent them from taking advantage of jobs that will exist” (Ref.^[4], p. xxvi). Without attention to these emerging requirements, employers would fail to tap the productivity of this increasing share of their workforce.

In response to this perceived need, then, a vast literature and cadre of consultants was marshaled who offered advice as to how to create a work environment that would better meet the needs of a diverse workforce (see, for example, Refs.^[1,5-14]). Employers were counseled that diversity management was distinct from the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action (AA) programs they already had in place. R. Roosevelt Thomas argued, for example, “Sooner or later, affirmative action will die a natural death. Its achievements have been stupendous, but . . . the premises that underlie it . . . look increasingly shopworn” (Ref.^[1], p. 107). Instead, Thomas argued, “The goal is to manage diversity to get from [it] the same productivity we once got from a homogenous work force, and do it without artificial programs, standards—or barriers” (Ref.^[1], p. 112).

In stating that the goal of diversity programs is to get “the same productivity” from the heterogeneous workforce, Thomas was making what is sometimes called the “business case” for diversity. That is, he suggested it is important for employers to invest in diversity programs because the result will be an improvement in the bottom line. This argument implies that a diversity program’s success should be evaluated with respect to any gains in organizational productivity. Ultimately, that may be the case. However, the precondition necessary for improvements in organizational effectiveness as a result of diversity management is the creation of an equitable work environment, free of discrimination, stereotypes, glass ceilings, and other impediments to the full participation and inclusion of women and people of color (Refs.^[5,11,15,16,64]). Without an equitable work environment, it is unrealistic to believe that women and people of color can enhance organizational productivity. As John P. Fernandez argues, for organizations to achieve high performance, they “simply must take specific steps to eliminate racism and sexism, in order to ensure that women and people of color receive their fair share of opportunities”.^[9]

Many diversity consultants such as Thomas have gone to great lengths to distinguish diversity programs from traditional EEO and AA. One way they do so is by suggesting that diversity goes far beyond gender and ethnicity to focus on *all* of the ways in which individuals differ from one another including background, age, education, and personality traits.^[1] In fact, more recently Thomas redefined diversity as any mixture of items characterized by





differences and similarities (Ref.^[8], p. 5). Another way the concept of diversity is set apart from EEO/AA is by claiming it is a “voluntary” effort undertaken by management in the interest of improving productivity, rather than something required by law. Diversity programs are not focused on efforts to remedy past discrimination, but rather are forward looking in their understanding of the value diversity can benefit an organization.

In distinguishing EEO/AA from diversity programs, many consultants were clearly trying to immunize them from the growing controversy about the former in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Reagan and Bush administrations’ opposition to affirmative action is well documented (see, for example, Refs.^[17–22]). At the same time, the Courts were raising the threshold by which affirmative action programs would be considered lawful. In *Richmond vs. J.A. Croson* (488 US 489) and *Adarand vs. Pena* (115 S. Ct. 2097) Sandra Day O’Connor wrote for the court that a “strict scrutiny” standard must now be applied to any race conscious measures employed by local/state, and federal government agencies, respectively. Indeed, several scholars have attributed the advance of the diversity management movement to the backlash against affirmative action, with the “crisis” foretold by the Hudson Institute reports providing a convenient starting gate.^[22–25]

It is precisely this suspicion about the need for, and value of managing diversity efforts that renders an effort to evaluate their effectiveness all the more critical. In addition to questions about the parentage of diversity management programs, critics have assailed the substance of these programs from both the left and right. Frederick Lynch, in his “expose” of the “diversity machine” charges that it “indiscriminately blends social science and ideology, serious substance with silly platitudes” (Ref.^[24], pp. 17–18). Among other concerns, Lynch argues that managing diversity programs’ focus on cultural differences often lead to negative stereotypes as well as “fear, silence, and intimidation” and to the “kindred censorship of political correctness” (Refs.^[24,25], pp. 18–19). A *Forbes* magazine article described the pressure on companies to provide diversity training as a “reign of terror” (Ref.^[26], see also Ref.^[27]). Others express the concern that diversity programs’ broadly inclusive focus beyond race and gender and justification as improving the bottom line deflects attention from the harder issues of historical racism and sexism and a continuing need for social justice.^[5,23,28]

Ivancevich and Gilbert (Ref.^[29], p. 79) urge researchers to replace “‘demography-as-destiny’ speeches and statements . . . with bottom-line data and proof that diversity management adds value to the organization and its employees.” They further note that little research has evaluated the effectiveness of diversity management programs, and suggest that there would be less cynicism about these efforts if more third-party evaluation studies were available. The purpose of this article is to contribute to filling that void in the literature.



**DIVERSITY PROGRAMS IN THE FEDERAL SECTOR**

The second Hudson Institute Report, entitled *Civil Service 2000*, was commissioned by the federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and specifically addressed the challenges the federal government would face as an employer over the coming decades.^[3] Not surprisingly, that report also advised the government to expect a growing proportion of women and minorities in its workforce and counseled federal agencies to “seek to maintain their leadership as exemplary employers of women and minorities” (Ref.^[3], p. 39). Perhaps because they already had a favorable record in this regard, federal agencies were slower to embrace the managing diversity movement than were private sector companies. A survey conducted by MSPB in 1993 revealed that agencies were devoting few resources to responding to changing workforce demographics.

By 1999, however, the picture had changed. In that year, the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (formerly the National Performance Review) Diversity Task Force administered a survey to 160 federal agencies and subagencies^a inquiring about their diversity programs. They received useable responses from 137 of those agencies, for a response rate of 86%. The survey revealed that the majority of federal agencies (88%) had programs in place to increase diversity and/or make better use of diversity already present. Those efforts varied widely, however. The majority, but certainly not all, of federal agencies (82%) reported that their diversity initiatives specifically addressed one or more nontraditional characteristics (e.g., communication style, economic status, geographic origin) consistent with the broader definition of diversity offered by R. Roosevelt Thomas. Similarly, 85% indicated that diversity training is provided as part of their initiative, although fewer (73%) convey specific training objectives to employees.

^aSubagencies are components of larger agencies and departments; examples include the Patent and Trademark Office within the Commerce Department and the Drug Enforcement Agency within the Department of Justice. NPR Diversity Task Force staff worked with designated individuals from each major department and agency to determine which of their subordinate units should be asked to complete the survey. In many respects, it is advantageous that these data were collected at the subagency level. Many evaluations of agencies’ success in meeting equity-related objectives (including those reported by OPM and the EEOC) rely on information aggregated at the full agency or department level, necessarily overlooking the significant differences there can be among subagencies within larger departments. Individuals from each agency who were most familiar with the organization’s diversity program completed the surveys. These included Directors of EEO or Civil Rights Offices and other high-level administrators. For purposes of this research, all organizations examined in this study will be referred to as “agencies.”





Agencies also vary in the means by which they communicate with employees about their diversity programs. Nearly three-quarters of agencies (73%) link the diversity initiative to the organization's strategic or performance plan while fewer than half (47%) have incorporated diversity into the organization's vision or mission statement. There are some differences in the ways in which employees are answerable for diversity objectives as well. More than three quarters (76%) report that employees are held accountable while only 44% offer awards and incentives for achieving diversity goals. Finally, resource commitments vary. Seventy-seven percent of agencies have more than one employee who performs significant diversity initiative-related duties, while only about one-third (33%) have invested in formal mentoring programs as part of their initiatives. (See Ref.^[2] for more discussion of survey responses.)

Evaluation of federal agency efforts is important because they involve the expenditure of taxpayer money, and because public sector agencies, of course, operate in a fishbowl. The FAA received adverse publicity in the *Washington Times* a few years ago, when it was forced to settle a dispute with air traffic controllers over diversity training that the controllers had found traumatic. "It was a government sponsored Tailbook," the lawyer representing one controller told the press, "The only differences were that the harassers were female, and the action was encouraged, sponsored and paid for by Uncle Sam."^[30] Members of Congress, concerned with an inability to hold federal agencies accountable for continued allegations of rampant discrimination, recently passed legislation to do so (Public Law No.: 107-174).

Yet, despite these concerns about accountability, there is little evidence that serious assessment efforts are underway at federal agencies. Fifty-five percent of agencies responding to the NPR survey reported using measures such as productivity and performance to assess the effectiveness of the diversity initiative. However, closer examination revealed that these measures primarily consisted of a comparison of agency demographics with the civilian labor force (already required by the EEOC) or referred to performance elements included in managers' and supervisors' performance plans. The latter, of course, only tells you whether the manager has performed the required duty, not its result. The utility of the former is limited in that it can take a long time to significantly change the overall composition of an agency's workforce.

As noted above, many diversity consultants argue that their ultimate goal is to increase organizational productivity and performance. However, these same consultants acknowledge that such a goal will only be realized once persistent racism and sexism and other impediments to the inclusion and advancement of women and people of color are eliminated (see, for example, Refs.^[9,31]). Gladys Gossett Hankins puts it this way: "When diversity is managed proactively, the organization . . . ceases recruitment, termination, training, development, placement, disciplinary action, promotional and salary practices that advantage some groups





while disadvantaging others” (Ref.^[32], pp. 12–13). From this perspective diversity management programs might well be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they promote the intermediate goal of providing equitable opportunities to diverse groups within organizations. The remainder of this article proposes such a means for evaluating agency diversity programs, applies that methodology to the federal government overall, and then to individual agencies.

HAVE FEDERAL AGENCY DIVERSITY PROGRAMS MADE A DIFFERENCE?

Measuring Program Development

In order to assess the impact of agency diversity management programs, systematic measures of the level of development of those programs at specific agencies are needed. Elsewhere, we have identified five separate programmatic components upon which such measures may be based.^[33] Those diversity program components include diversity training, internal communications, accountability, resource commitments, and the scope of the programs in terms of the number of demographic attributes addressed. Table 1 presents each of these components and the items from the NPR survey that are included in indices designed to measure each one.

The survey items were dichotomous variables coded 0 if an organization did not report having a programmatic feature in place and 1 if the program characteristic was present. Scores for each of the components (training, communication, etc.) were obtained by summing the responses to each of the relevant survey items. A summary measure of the overall level of development of agency diversity programs was then constructed by converting each of the dimensional sub-indices to standardized or *Z* scores and then summing those scores. Alpha scores indicate that there is a high degree of internal consistency among the items included in each index. Table 2 presents descriptive information on each of these measures. As can be seen, there is variation on each dimension as well as the summary measure. The U.S. Coast Guard obtained the highest overall score (7.58), and obtained maximum scores on each of the program components examined. Scores on each of the component measures for each organization studied are reported in Ref.^[33]

Indicators of Programmatic Success

The next step was to identify outcome variables or indicators of diversity program success. Authors such as R. Roosevelt Thomas^[1] define





Table 1. Components of diversity programs.

Index scores represent the sum of the activities reported as part of agency diversity programs under each of the following headings

Training ($\alpha = 0.83$)

- Diversity training is part of the diversity management program
- Training is designed to accomplish specific objectives
- Training objectives are communicated to employees

Communication ($\alpha = 0.72$)

- There is a diversity management program implementation plan
- Diversity is incorporated into agency vision or mission statement
- There is a diversity policy, directive, or administrative order
- Diversity management program includes the use of communication media (e.g., newsletter, intranet)
- Diversity management program is linked to the agency strategic plan

Accountability ($\alpha = 0.70$)

- The agency uses measures (e.g., productivity, performance) to assess the effectiveness of its diversity program in achieving stated objectives
- Employees are held accountable for taking appropriate actions to achieve the objectives of the diversity program
- There is a diversity program accomplishment or status report
- The diversity program is linked to the agency's annual performance plan
- The diversity program includes awards and incentives
- The agency evaluates the effectiveness of diversity training provided to employees

Additional resource commitment ($\alpha = 0.59$)

- There is a diversity resource center of diversity reading room
 - The diversity initiative includes a formal mentoring program
 - The agency has a diversity council/group charter
 - The agency has conducted an organizational culture/diversity audit or survey
 - The diversity program includes an informal mentoring program
 - The program includes an internship program
 - There is one individual in the agency who has primary operational responsibility for the diversity program on a full-time basis
 - Other than one individual who has primary responsibility for diversity, there are other employees who perform significant duties directly related to the implementation of the diversity program
 - There is a specific identifiable amount designated in the organization's budget for the diversity management program
-

(continued)



*Table 1.* Continued.

Demographic attributes addressed (scope) (alpha = 0.91)

- Age
- Communication style
- Disability (physical/mental)
- Economic status
- Education
- Ethnicity/national origin
- Family status (e.g., single parent, elder-care provider)
- First language
- Gender
- Geographic origin (e.g., east, west, midwest, south)
- Military experience/veteran status
- Organizational role/level (e.g., managerial, clerical)
- Race/color
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Work experience (e.g., routine, repetitive, creative)
- Work style (e.g., individualistic, collaborative)

diversity in terms of a broad number of characteristics. But in the context of American public agencies, race, ethnicity, and gender are among the most salient demographic variables, and allegations of discrimination along these lines are not uncommon (see, for example, Refs.^[34-36]). This is why, when agencies were asked on the NPR survey to describe their measures of effectiveness of their diversity programs, many referred to measures that are traditionally used for EEO/affirmative action programs such as a comparison of workforce demographics with the civilian labor force. However, as noted earlier, it can take a long time to change significantly the composition of an organization in those terms. As a result, such a comparison may not be the best short-term estimate of the effectiveness of a diversity program.

Rather, more dynamic measures of the extent to which diversity management programs have succeeded in establishing more equitable environments for women and minorities within work organizations are necessary (see, Ref.^[31]). It has been suggested that efforts to track selected personnel actions will aid senior managers in assessing the effectiveness of diversity programs.^[32] We examine three such actions: promotions, discharges, and voluntary quits, using data from the OPMs Central Personnel Data File (CPDF), an employment database that includes most civilian federal employees.



**Table 2.** Characteristics of measures of the nature of agency diversity programs.

Program dimension	Training	Communications	Accountability	Resources	Scope	Summary measure
<i>N</i>	107	133	121	123	133	97
Minimum	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-8.04
Maximum	3.00	5.00	6.00	9.00	17.00	7.58
Mean	2.29	2.30	3.17	3.41	8.95	0.047
Std. deviation	1.18	1.71	2.01	2.23	5.47	4.43

Promotions

The availability of promotion opportunities for minorities and women within an organization is an important indicator of equity. Because agency diversity programs are expected to help to create environments within which all people have the opportunity to advance and succeed, we anticipate that agency diversity programs and their components will be positively associated with improved prospects for promotions for minorities and women.

The question as to whether federally-employed minorities and women are advancing to the same levels as comparably qualified nonminority men was the subject of considerable attention in the early 1990s. The dearth of minorities and women in senior federal jobs was seen as evidence of the "glass ceiling," or the inequitable advancement opportunities that the Department of Labor found in its examination of private sector companies.^[37] Two studies by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board found that such a barrier was also limiting advancement opportunities for women and minorities in the federal government.^[38,39] The Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs held hearings on the subject, where then-Chairman of the EEOC, Evan Kemp, admitted that his agency had not fully enforced affirmative action requirements among federal agencies and so was partly responsible for the maldistribution of top-level positions.^[40] The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) and MSPB agreed that agencies would need to be more proactive if equal opportunities for advancement were to be made available to minorities and women.^[38,39,41,42]

We chose to examine promotions from the GS-9 and GS-12 levels (considered collectively) in jobs classified as professional and administrative. In its studies, the MSPB found that women and minorities are promoted proportionately less than men and nonminorities from entry or lower level jobs (e.g., grades GS-7 or GS-9) in professional and administrative occupations.^[38,39] It is for that reason that we include in our analysis promotion





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rates from GS-9 positions. Many professional and administrative positions, however, have career ladders where incumbent employees can expect to be promoted to a journey level grade of GS-12 without competition. For that reason, we also examine promotions from GS-12 to GS-13, where incumbents are more likely to face competitive promotion decisions.

In subsequent analyses the dependent variables are based on the assumption that equity occurs when minorities and women are promoted (or face other personnel actions) in proportion to their presence in the organizations studied. For example, if minorities represent 10% of the workforce in a specified grade level and agency, they should receive at least 10% of the promotions in that organization and at that grade level if the environment within the organization is to be considered equitable. With this notion in mind, a simple measure can be developed in which, for a given agency and year, the minority (or female) share of total promotions from grades 9 and 12 is calculated relative to the minority (or female) share of the workforce in those same grade levels. This measure provides an indicator of equity for a specified group without the need to make explicit comparisons between groups as would be the case when the proportion of one group that is promoted is compared to the proportions of other groups that are promoted. The measure (for minority promotions for a given agency) is illustrated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Minority Promotions from GS 9 and 12/} \\ \text{Total Number of Promotions from GS 9 and 12}}{\text{Number of Minorities in GS 9 and 12/} \\ \text{Total Number of Positions in GS 9 and 12}}$$

As indicated, for each agency studied, the numerator consists of the number of minority (or female) promotions from GS 9 and GS 12 positions divided by the total number of promotions from those grade levels in that same agency. The denominator is based on the number of minorities (or women) employed in GS 9 and GS 12 positions in the specified agency divided by the total number of positions in the agency at those levels. A quotient of one means that the minority share of promotions is equal to the minority share of the workforce. A quotient of less than one means minorities are being promoted disproportionately less than their share of the workforce.

It is clear that in some agencies, minorities or women could be promoted at rates resulting in their share of promotions being significantly less than their share of the relevant workforce. In other agencies, minority or female promotions may be greater than their share of the workforce would lead one to expect. In fact, based on 1999 data, there is considerable variation on this measure among the agencies we study. The question is whether that variation is associated systematically with the presence of

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agency diversity efforts. We expect that in those agencies that are doing more with respect to diversity program activities, the minority or female share of promotions in the grades examined relative to their share of the workforce in those grades will be higher than it is in agencies that are doing less or nothing regarding diversity management, holding constant the influence of other important variables.

Dismissals

Hankins^[32] suggests that employers that want to understand the impact of prejudice and discrimination in the workplace should assess whether disciplinary practices are resulting in disparate treatment, because it has been shown that there is a tendency to discipline African-American employees more harshly than white employees. Indeed, in April of 1995, OPM released the findings of a 14-month investigation that showed that, in fiscal year 1992, African-American federal employees were discharged from their jobs at a rate three times greater than that of white employees.^[43] The likelihood of being dismissed was also associated with factors such as gender, education, and type of employment. But even controlling for other variables, OPM concluded “there is no other known quantitative factor or combination of factors, excluding race that entirely accounts for the disparity in discharge rates for African-Americans” (Ref.^[43], p. 17).

Similar patterns with regard to disparate rates of discipline have been found in other public employment settings including a region of the US Postal Service,^[44] the US Navy,^[45] the state of California^[46] and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).^[47,48] The IRS conducted an exhaustive study to identify the causes of the disparity, as did the MSPB.^[49] These agencies were no more successful than OPM in identifying one or more specific causes of the disparity. The Office of Personnel Management suggested that comments offered by agency managers, labor union representatives, and employee relations specialists during focus groups it convened provided some insight into the matter. Many individuals suggested that “actual bias or lack of cultural awareness” was an explanation (Ref.^[43], p. ii).

Such attitudes represent precisely the kind of dissension that managing diversity programs are designed to address.^[50] Therefore, it seems appropriate to ask whether discharge rates for African-Americans in selected grades (relative to their shares of agency workforces in those grades) will be smaller in agencies with more expansive managing diversity programs than in agencies with less developed diversity efforts (or no efforts), other things being equal. Our discharge measure for African-Americans is calculated for General Schedule (GS) and related grades 1 through 12 collectively for the





year 1999 in the same fashion as our promotion ratio discussed above. In this case, a quotient of greater than one means that African-Americans are discharged in numbers greater than their representation in the workforce in grades 1 through 12.^b

Voluntary Turnover

The third and final variable used as an indicator of the effectiveness of federal agency diversity efforts is based on voluntary separations by African-Americans. Unwanted turnover can have severe consequences for organizations.^[51] In the late 1980s, the National Academy of Public Administration,^[52] the National Commission on the Public Service (Ref.^[53], known more commonly as the Volcker Commission), the GAO^[54] and others spoke of an impending “quiet crisis” in the federal government, resulting from its inability to retain its fair share of the “best and brightest.”

A decision to quit is strongly influenced by employees’ age, education, and level of pay.^[55–57] However, voluntary turnover can also result from dissatisfaction with the job^[57] and perceptions of unfairness in decisions regarding work-related outcomes (e.g., promotions).^[58] There is evidence that African-Americans are often less satisfied with their jobs than whites^[59] and are more likely to perceive a lack of fairness.^[60] As recently as the year 2000, 54% of African-Americans responding to a federal government-wide survey indicated that they believed that African-Americans are subjected to “flagrant or obviously discriminatory practices that hinder their career advancement” (Ref.^[61], p. 2).

A more equitable work environment, expected to result from diversity management efforts, should ameliorate perceptions of discrimination and increase job satisfaction for African-Americans. Therefore, we expect that in agencies where greater effort is devoted to diversity programs the proportion of African-Americans voluntarily leaving their jobs will be smaller (relative to their share of the workforce) than in agencies where less diversity management activity is present. We examine voluntary separations by African-Americans in the year 1999 in grade ranges GS 1 through 15 collectively. Our measure is constructed in a fashion similar to that used for our promotion and discharge ratios.

Method of Analysis

We estimate multiple regression equations to assess the relationship between agency diversity programs and the achievement of employment equity, as indicated by promotion, dismissal, and voluntary separation ratios

^bThe number of discharges above the GS 12 level is too few to permit meaningful analysis.





observed in 1999. In our first set of regressions, we examine the impact of each of our indicators of the development of specific programmatic dimensions (i.e., training, communication, accountability, resources, and scope—see Table 1) on the equity measures. The purpose is to determine which (if any) programmatic dimensions are important and which are more important than others. In a second set of regressions, we examine the impact of the general level of development of agency diversity program effort using our summary index. We expect that in agencies with stronger diversity programs, there will be a significant and positive relationship between the diversity program measure and promotion ratios for minorities and women. The relationship between the diversity program and the dismissal and voluntary turnover ratios for African-Americans should be significant and negative.

We also include in all regressions a measure of the same promotion, dismissal, and quit ratios that serve as our dependent variables calculated from 1993 data (as opposed to 1999 data). The inclusion of this variable in each model is intended to serve a function analogous to that of a pretest in quasi-experimental evaluation designs. As noted previously, the MSPB has reported that diversity programs were not present in any substantial way in federal agencies as of 1993.^[42] Consequently, promotion, dismissal, and quit ratios from that year are the result of forces within agencies prior to the emergence of diversity efforts. Presumably, those forces would include a variety of work force dynamics, labor market characteristics, institutional features, and policy sector elements. Importantly, they would also reflect the effects of traditional equal employment opportunity/affirmative employment programs (EEO/AEP) in operation within the agencies. Inclusion of the 1993 ratios in the models will, therefore, control to a large extent for the magnitude of those efforts as well as other agency characteristics present prior to the development of diversity management programs.

In order to examine the relationships between agency diversity efforts and our dependent variables, we had to match agencies and subagencies responding to the NPR survey to equivalent units tracked in the CPDF in 1993 and 1999. Matches could be made among the three datasets for 98 agencies.^c

^cBecause of reorganizations, data on all of the organizations in the NPR survey dataset could not be found in the CPDF data for both 1993 and 1999. In addition, distortions in the dependent variables in this analysis are possible when very small numbers of the personnel actions examined are present in an agency. For example, if there is only one promotion and that promotion happens to go to a non-minority employee, the number of minority promotions is equal to zero, and the minority promotion ratio will equal zero. Alternatively, if the only promotion goes to a minority, then minorities will receive 100% of the promotions, and the minority promotion ratio will be significantly inflated. To mitigate these characteristics of the measures, only cases with five or more of the personnel actions examined are analysed.





Results

The results from our analysis of the effects of specified program dimensions are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, with respect to female promotion rates in 1999, our model accounts for 24.5% of the variation, but the only significant variable is the 1993 promotion ratio. This finding suggests that the various

Table 3. Impact of diversity program dimensions on selected indicators.

Dependent variable	Independent variables	<i>b</i>	Beta	<i>t</i> Statistic
Female promotion ratio in 1999	1993 rate	0.248	0.482	4.378***
	Training	-0.014	-0.063	-0.366
	Scope	-0.002	-0.037	-0.230
	Communication	0.037	0.229	0.854
	Accountability	-0.013	-0.084	-0.378
	Resources	0.005	0.045	0.181
		$R^2 = 0.245$	$N = 72$	
Minority promotion ratio in 1999	1993 rate	0.201	0.292	2.653**
	Training	0.006	0.034	0.200
	Scope	-0.016	-0.350	-2.198**
	Communication	0.105	0.810	3.064**
	Accountability	-0.012	-0.089	-0.409
	Resources	-0.029	-0.305	-1.234
		$R = 0.249$	$N = 72$	
Black dismissal ratio in 1999	1993 rate	-0.297	-0.179	-1.210
	Training	0.183	0.119	0.568
	Scope	0.002	0.004	0.023
	Communication	0.067	0.066	0.189
	Accountability	0.158	0.153	0.530
	Resources	0.009	0.013	0.041
		$R^2 = 0.098$	$N = 56$	
Black quit ratio in 1999	1993 rate	0.557	0.575	5.477***
	Training	0.023	0.078	0.493
	Scope	0.005	0.064	0.440
	Communication	-0.008	-0.040	-0.157
	Accountability	-0.035	-0.167	-0.799
	Resources	-0.011	-0.070	-0.311
		$R^2 = 0.374$	$N = 72$	

* $p > 0.05$.

** $p > 0.01$.

*** $p > 0.001$.

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dimensions of diversity programs examined bear no significant relationship to the promotion of women in the federal agencies examined. The promotion ratio for women in 1999 appears to largely the result of forces that were in place prior to the development of agency diversity management programs.

Slightly different results are found, however, with regard to minority promotions in 1999. In that case, the 1993 rate is significant, but so too are the scope of the program in terms of the number of aspects of diversity addressed, and agencies' internal communications about their diversity efforts. The finding on programmatic scope indicates that in those agencies that have more broadly defined diversity efforts, our measure of minority promotions is lower. This indicates that the fear that diffuse diversity efforts, focusing on a broad set of characteristics will not be effective in achieving greater equity for women and minorities may be warranted (see, for example, Refs.^[5,23,28]). The coefficient on the communication variable is significant, however, indicating that more attention to communication regarding diversity programs is associated with more favorable outcomes for minority promotions. This suggests it may be worthwhile for an agency to devote diversity program resources to communicating its commitment to workplace equity, and linking that commitment to key communication mechanisms, such as the agency's strategic plan. The R^2 value indicates that approximately 25% of the variation in minority promotions is accounted for by our model.

With respect to the dismissal of African-Americans in 1999, it appears that the ratio does not vary significantly with any of the independent variables in the model. In other words, knowledge of the 1993 rate would not give one any insight into African-American dismissals in 1999, and it is also the case that the 1999 rates are unrelated to any of the dimensions of diversity management programs examined. It would seem that African-American dismissal rates within the agencies studied are the product of idiosyncratic factors as yet to be specified. This is not surprising given the inability of researchers to fully account for the disparity.^[43,49]

Finally, the regression in which African-American quits are examined yields results similar to those found for female promotion rates. The 1999 quit ratios for African-Americans are positively and significantly associated with 1993 quit ratios. There is no evidence that any of the specified dimensions of agency diversity programs has had any impact on the propensity of African-Americans to leave their federal jobs.

Results from our analysis of the impact of the general level of development of agency diversity programs are presented in Table 4. The regressions here bring us to conclusions similar to those reached for individual dimensions of agency diversity programs. Specifically, in three out of four cases, (female promotions, minority promotions, and African-American quits), the only significant variable is the pre-intervention ratios from 1993 for those same



**Table 4.** Impact of general level of diversity program development on selected indicators.

Dependent variable	Independent variables	<i>b</i>	Beta	<i>t</i> Statistic
Female promotion ratio in 1999	1993 rate	0.242	0.469	4.424***
	Summary index	0.007	0.091	0.856
		$R^2 = 0.226$	$N = 72$	
Minority promotion ratio in 1999	1993 rate	0.200	0.291	2.514**
	Summary index	0.008	0.130	1.119
		$R^2 = 0.091$	$N = 72$	
Black dismissal ratio in 1999	1993 rate	-0.294	-0.177	-1.278
	Summary index	0.150	0.311	2.246*
		$R^2 = 0.092$	$N = 56$	
Black quit ratio in 1999	1993 rate	0.566	0.585	6.047***
	Summary index	-0.013	-0.133	-1.377
		$R^2 = 0.355$	$N = 72$	

* $p > 0.05$.** $p > 0.01$.*** $p > 0.001$.

variables. In those instances, the summary index of diversity program development fails to achieve statistical significance. With respect to 1999 African-American dismissal rates, however, the opposite conclusion is reached. The 1993 rate is insignificant, but the summary index does bear a significant relationship to African-American dismissals. Interestingly, however, the direction of that relationship is positive, indicating that agencies with generally more broadly defined diversity programs are also those agencies with *higher* African-American dismissal ratios. Clearly, then, at the time our variables were measured, broader diversity efforts had not generally reduced involuntary turnover among African-Americans. This finding may suggest that those agencies with the largest problems regarding African-American dismissals have invested more heavily in diversity management programs.

Overall, these results lead to a rather pessimistic view of the effectiveness of federal diversity programs. There is virtually no evidence that diversity programs have helped to increase the promotions of women or minorities or have reduced African-American dismissals or quits. While it appears that increased efforts at communication of diversity program activities are positively associated with minority promotions, there are no other findings indicative of program effectiveness. The indications are, then, that in the aggregate, diversity programs do not appear to be making much of a

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difference—at least with respect to the outcomes examined here. Analysis of selected individual agencies, however, should provide additional insight.

EVALUATING INDIVIDUAL AGENCY EFFORTS

As noted earlier, since the passage of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1994, federal agencies have been required to set performance goals, measure their progress in achieving them, and report the results to Congress. Congress, no doubt, had mission related outcomes in mind when requesting these data, rather than the kinds of measures of workplace equity discussed in this article. Nevertheless, in passing what was commonly called the “No Fear Act” (PL 107-174) in 2002, it was clear that Congress also wanted to increase agency accountability for the mistreatment of employees. As noted in Section 101 of the Act, “Federal agencies cannot be run effectively if those agencies practice or tolerate discrimination.”^d We therefore propose, that federal agencies can and should use empirical measures to assess whether their diversity programs have had the effect of increasing workplace equity.

The following sections provide case studies of two agency diversity programs, and demonstrate how the ratios described in this article can be used to assess the impact of those programs. These agencies were selected because their scores on the summary index presented in Table 2 suggest they have noteworthy diversity programs. These case studies are based on a review of diversity program documentation, and interviews with the diversity program directors and other staff during the summer of 2001.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is a bureau within the U.S. Department of Commerce with a workforce of about 12,000. It was created in 1970 and today collects data about the atmosphere, sun, and oceans in order to sustain and protect the environment and issue warnings about potentially dangerous conditions. In 1994, following protests against the agency staged by an employee organization called Blacks at Commerce, then Secretary Ron Brown required all bureaus to establish diversity councils. Since that time, NOAA has established one of the federal government’s most comprehensive diversity programs, receiving the 7th highest score (6.10) on the summary score of program development (see Table 2). The purpose of the NOAA program is to examine “the entire organization and its systems,

^dAn amendment to the Act proposed by a Senate staffer would have specifically required federal agencies to collect data and compute the specific ratios suggested in this article. That amendment, however, was not included in the final bill.





policies and practices to determine inhibitors to change and inclusion” (Ref.^[62], p. 1). These changes, according to NOAA documents, are needed to ensure the agency can attract and retain a diverse workforce.^[63]

NOAA’s commitment to its diversity program is evident in several ways. The bureau has a Diversity Office which is separate from the Civil Rights/EEO function as well as the human resource management function. In January, 1997, a full time director was hired to head this office and it now has another seven full-time staff and a substantial budget. The director reports directly to the Deputy Undersecretary for NOAA, who also chairs the Diversity Council. The Council, which oversees the bureau’s entire diversity effort, includes a top executive from each of NOAA’s seven sub-agencies as well as representatives from employee groups. The diversity element now represents 15% of senior executives’ performance plans, and is included in all other supervisors’ plans as well. In addition, there are hundreds of others within the organization that comprise NOAA’s “network of champions,” including dozens of diversity liaisons, consultants and facilitators. Many of these individuals no longer serve the diversity program in a formal capacity, but will forever bring to their day-to-day work the training and experience they received when they were in these roles.

The crux of NOAA’s diversity program is experiential learning. In 1998 and 2002, they administered an organizational assessment survey to the entire workforce. The results, aggregated by work group, were then given to work groups along with a facilitator who guided discussion about the issues raised by the survey. These discussions were intended to empower employees to uncover barriers to inclusion and participation in the form of work policies and practices. Other components of NOAA’s diversity program include an educational series, a Spectrum Diversity award presented annually to individuals who have made contributions to creating an inclusive work environment, and a Diversity Resource Center. The bureau subscribes to a website sponsored by Sirota where managers post action items, engage in discussions, and learn about best practices. Mentoring is also included in the diversity program, although it is administered by the human resource office. Training is made available to anyone who wants it, and the Diversity Council is considering rolling out mandatory diversity training.

To what extent, then, has NOAA’s diversity program been effective in creating greater equity in the workplace? Figure 1 illustrates the change in promotion ratios for women and minorities in NOAA in GS-9 and GS-12 jobs (combined) from 1988–1999.

It shows that promotion ratios for women were favorable (i.e., above 1.0) in the period before program implementation, but were decreasing. By the time the Diversity Council was established in 1994, the ratios were right about at 1.0, indicating women were being promoted in proportion to their



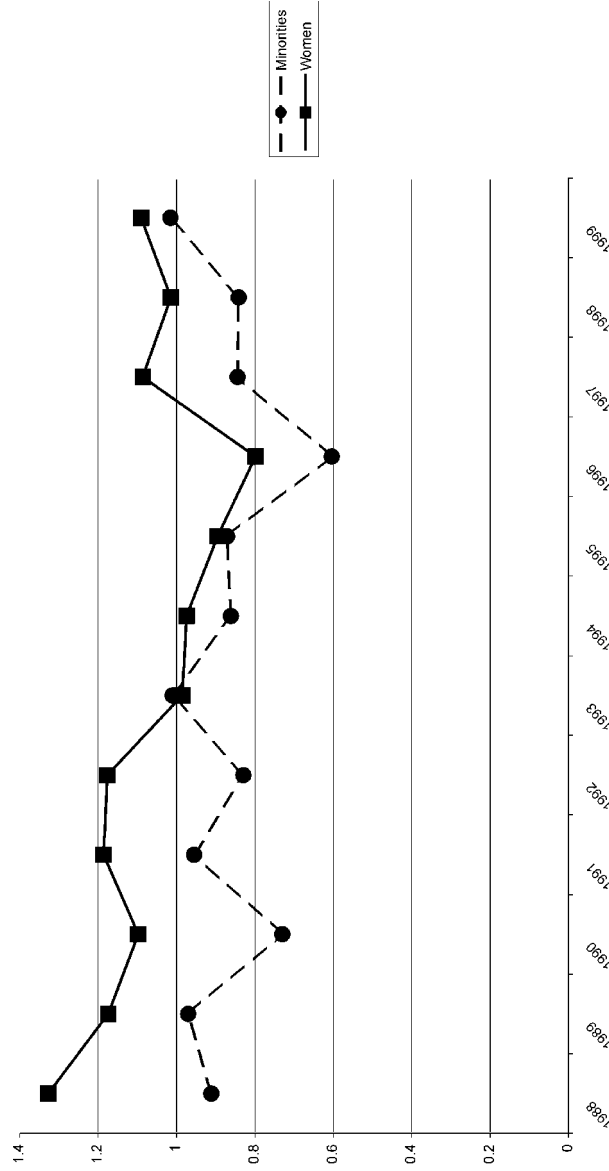


Figure 1. Promotion ratios for women and minorities at NOAA 1988–1999. Source: Central Personnel Data File.

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representation in the workforce in grades 9 and 12. The ratios continued to decline for two years reaching a low of 0.80 in 1996, but then started to climb. However, by 1999, the ratios had only climbed back up to where they were in 1993, before the program was implemented.

The promotion ratio for minorities was at or below 1.0 until 1996, where it also reached a low of 0.6. As with women, minority employees' prospects for promotion then began to rise, reaching 1.0 in 1999. The increase in promotion ratios after the full-time Director was hired in 1997 suggests that having an individual in such a role may be an important factor in diversity program success. More time will be required to ascertain whether the climb in these ratios will continue.

Figure 2 presents the firing and quit ratios for African-Americans from 1988–1999. As can be seen, the quit ratio at NOAA has hovered at about 1.0 throughout the 12-year time frame, although it reached its most favorable point (i.e., below 1.0) at the time the Diversity Council was established. In the last year shown, it rose again to nearly 1.5.

The dismissal ratio for African-Americans has been much more erratic. These data mirror the idiosyncratic pattern noted in the analysis of governmentwide data presented above. The ratio reached a high of nearly 4.5 before the program was implemented in 1993. While it dropped to 1.0, one year after the Council was established, the following year it jumped back up to more than 3.0. As with the promotion ratios, there has been positive movement since the Director was hired in 1997. More time will be required to ascertain whether this positive trend continues. Further research is also required to identify the factors that cause this ratio to vary so much from year to year.

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is an agency located within the US Department of the Interior. It has a workforce of approximately 7800 employees and is charged with the responsibility of supervising and maintaining 264 million acres of public land located primarily in 12 western states and Alaska. The agency is responsible for a wide range of public resources that include grasslands, forests, mountains, arctic tundra, and deserts and has authority for policies covering a variety of issues including "energy and minerals, timber, forage, wild horse and burro populations, fish and wildlife habitat, wilderness areas, archaeological, paleontological, and historic sites" found on federal lands. In the most general sense, the mission of the BLM is to sustain the "health, diversity, and productivity of public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations" (<http://www.blm.gov>).

Historically, the BLM, like its parent department, had not developed an exemplary record on civil rights and equal employment opportunity issues. This

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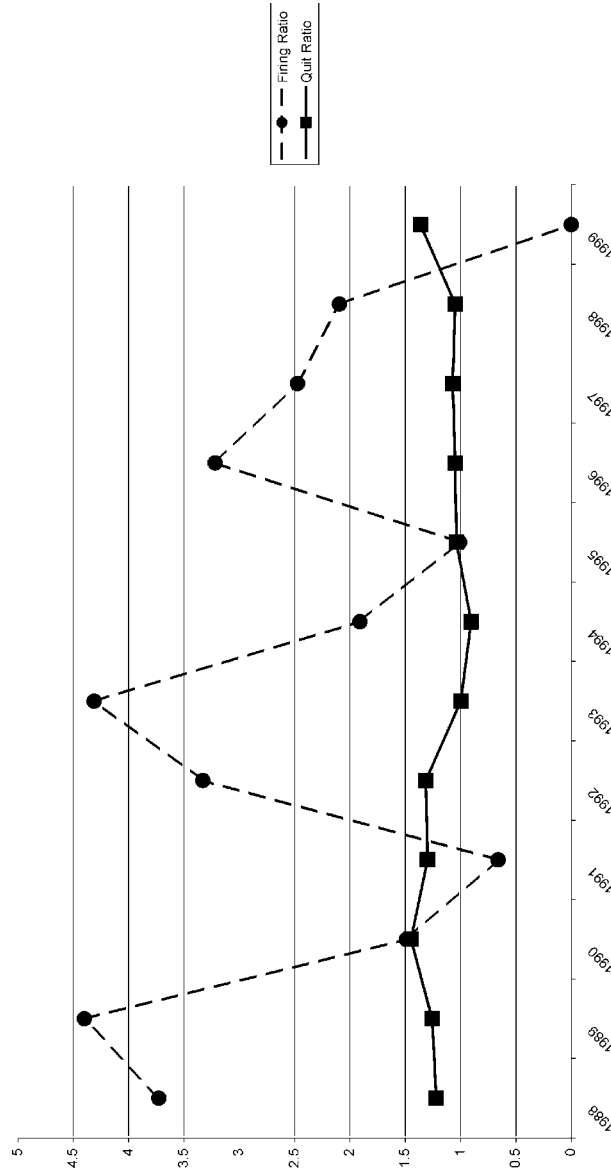


Figure 2. Quit and dismissal ratios for African-Americans at NOAA 1988-1999. Source: Central Personnel Data File.

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was at least in part to the difficulties the agency has experienced in attracting minorities and women to its workforce. Consequently, during the Clinton Administration top officials in the Department of the Interior and the BLM made a commitment to changing the agency's profile and worked hard to do so. An outgrowth of that effort was the establishment of a diversity program 1996.

Although there has been concern for increasing the employment of women and minorities within the BLM, the agency's diversity management program is broader in orientation than traditional EEO and affirmative action efforts, according to Gloria Innis, Director of the agency's EEO Group. Innis argues that the diversity program at the BLM transcends the traditional approach by focusing on additional issues not covered by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act such as sexual orientation and geographic origin, and it includes flexibilities to accommodate single mothers or people who have large distances to commute to get to work. The agency's "Diversity Committee" is comprised of representatives of various offices and groups. It provides a venue for the discussion of diversity-related issues and conveys guidance for the program staff as they work to promote an equitable work environment within the agency.

An important aspect of the program at the BLM is diversity training that is intended to eventually change the agency's work environment or culture in ways that will make the Bureau a more supportive or hospitable place for employees of all social backgrounds. The training is mandatory for all supervisors and managers and is focused on such issues as preventing and resolving interpersonal conflict, providing accessibility and reasonable accommodations for the disabled, and preventing discrimination and sexual harassment. The hope is that an outcome of diversity training will be the prevention and resolution of conflict before it develops into major disputes. Notably, the orientation process for all new employees contains a diversity awareness segment similar to the mandatory training for supervisors and managers.

Other aspects of the agency's program do run parallel to more traditional EEO and affirmative action functions, however. The program is implemented by the agency's EEO Group and much of the work of the program staff is focused on minority and female recruitment. Visits are made regularly to colleges and universities with significant minority enrollments, for example, in an effort to attract new minority employees to job opportunities at the BLM. The program staff are also very concerned with retention of employees from underrepresented groups, and the conduct exit interviews of employees who voluntarily leave the agency to identify ways to improve minority and female retention.

How effective has the diversity program at the been in creating or promoting an equitable work environment in the agency? Figure 3 provides data on trends in promotion ratios for women and minorities at the agency in GS 9 and GS 12 jobs (collectively) from 1988 to 1999. As can be seen, in 1988 promotion ratios for women were quite favorable (above 1.0), but the

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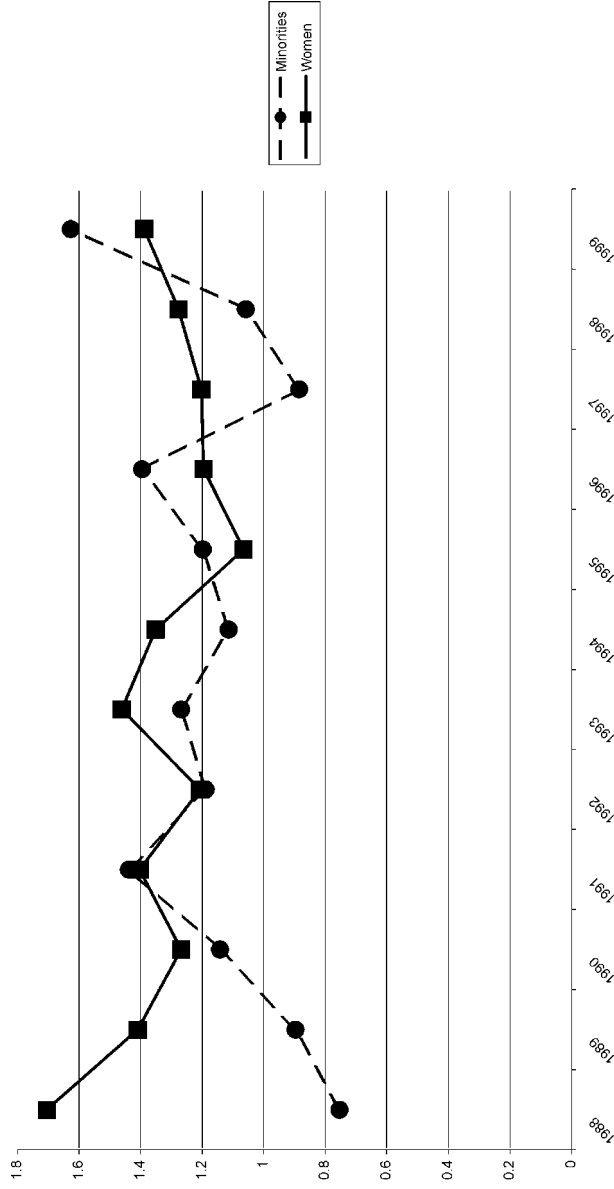


Figure 3. Promotion ratios for women and minorities at BLM 1988-1999. Source: Central Personnel Data File.

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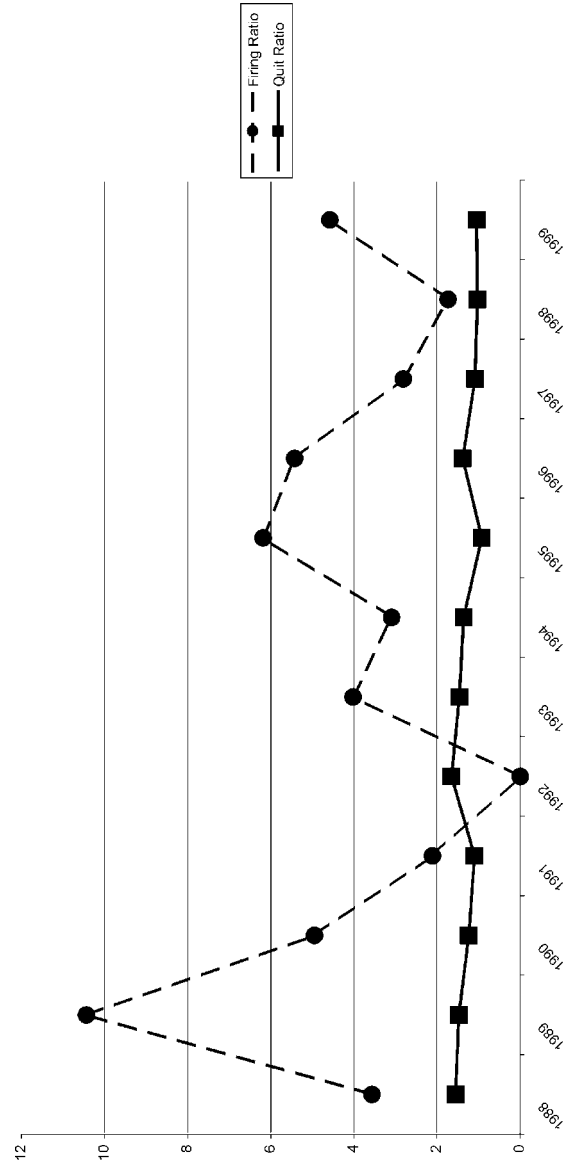


Figure 4. Quit and dismissal ratios for African-Americans at BLM 1988–1999. Source: Central Personnel Data File.

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situation for minorities was less advantageous (the ratio was below 1.0). By 1990, however, both groups had ratios above 1.0 and they continued at that level with some fluctuation from year to year prior to the beginning of the diversity management program in 1996. Following the initiation of the program, the promotion ratio for women began a steady climb upward, but it failed to reach levels as high as it had achieved in 1988 or 1993. The promotion ratio for minorities declined sharply following the establishment of the BLM diversity program (although remaining only slightly below 1.0), but from 1997 to 1999, that trend was reversed as the ratio climbed sharply.

Data on quit and dismissal ratios for African-Americans at the BLM are provided in Figure 4. As was the case with NOAA, the quit ratio at BLM is at or slightly above 1.0 throughout the period examined. In general, quit behavior by African-Americans has been remarkably stable across time as measured by our ratio. The pattern with regard to African-American dismissals is different however. In the early 1990s the ratio was quite high with the African-Americans share of dismissals in 1989 being more than 10 times their share of the BLM labor force (in GS and related grades 1–12 considered collectively). The ratio was zero in 1992 (no African-Americans were dismissed), but it climbed again to a substantially disproportionate level by the time the diversity program was established in 1996. Following the implementation of the program, there is an immediate downturn in the dismissal ratio followed by an upswing in the last year observed.

CONCLUSION

Since the early 1990s, many federal agencies have followed the lead of their private sector counterparts in establishing diversity management programs. These efforts were expected to improve opportunities for women and minorities in the workplace, with the ultimate objective of enhancing organizational productivity. They require, of course, the expenditure of taxpayer dollars and, as a result, have occasionally been maligned in the press. Diversity programs have been criticized as being too heavy-handed by some, and for being too diffuse in their focus by others. There is every reason, then, that they should be subject to the same performance evaluation requirements that other federal programs are subject to.

A 1999 survey of federal agencies showed that most federal subagencies have undertaken such efforts, albeit with wide variation in the nature and scope of their diversity programs. We proposed three measures, based on promotions, dismissals, and voluntary turnover, that can serve as proxies of employment equity. The overall development, and the development of specific dimensions of diversity programs were used as independent variables in regression analyses to





determine the relationship between diversity programs and the achievement of employment equity. We found that, for the most part, there is no evidence that broad diversity programs, nor each of their components, have been effective in creating better environments for women and minorities. An exception was that there was a positive relationship between the extent and nature of agency communication about their diversity programs and minority promotions. It also appears, however, that an equitable minority promotion ratio may be threatened by diversity programs that focus on a broad range of demographic characteristics; a fear which has been expressed in the literature.

These same outcome measures were then used to conduct a preliminary assessment of the impact of diversity programs at two federal agencies, NOAA and the BLM. These agencies were chosen because the high score they received on our summary index suggested they have significant diversity programs. This was further confirmed by an analysis of the agencies' diversity program literature, and interviews with diversity program staff. These analyses showed, however, that, at best, the diversity programs at these agencies have yielded mixed results, rather than consistent improvements in the promotion, dismissal, or quit ratios examined across time.

This, by no means, is meant to imply the final word on the effectiveness of diversity programs. Clearly, the examination of other outcome measures and forms of evaluation of diversity programs could be helpful. Nevertheless, this research has made a preliminary effort to do so with the object of generating greater discussion and analysis of what to date has been an under-evaluated, but essential endeavor.

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