

DIVERSITY NEWS

December 2008

Yvonne: In last month's edition of Diversity News, we listened in on a round table discussion held by VA's Human Resources and Administration leaders on diversity management issues facing VA today.

Thomas: This month we hear from Mike Dole, Director of Workforce and Analysis in VA's Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity.

Yvonne: The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Management Directive 715, or MD-715, requires agencies to take appropriate steps to ensure that all employment decisions are free from discrimination.

It also sets forth the standards by which EEOC will review the sufficiency of agency Title VII and Rehabilitation Act programs, which include periodic agency self-assessments and the removal of barriers to free and open workplace competition.

Thomas: Mr. Dole provides us with an overview of VA's MD-715 workforce data, focusing specifically on VA's fiscal year 2009 EEO Plan to eliminate identified barriers, or Part I of the MD-715.

Mike: Hi, I'm Mike Dole, Director of Workforce Analysis in the Office of Diversity Management and EEO with a report on the end of fiscal year 2008 workforce data in VA focusing on representation that is by race, national origin, and gender and on promotion rates.

This is the information that is the foundation for the EEO report that VA sends to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The comparison for race and gender is the relevant civilian labor force; that means all of the people employed in just our occupations in the 2000 census.

Comparing our employment to that of other employers of our occupations, VA is underrepresented in four groups: White women, Hispanic men, Hispanic women, and Asian women.

Now, the onboard representation is the result of forty years of hires and separation.

The hiring rate is the real test of how we're doing against the relevant civilian labor force and as you can see in VHA, they are underrepresented in three groups: White women and Hispanic men and women.

The hiring rate is how fast we're bringing them in and if you bring a group in below their representation rate you're not going to catch up.

The picture is much the same in Veterans Benefits; they are underrepresented in four groups: White women, Hispanic men and women, and Asian women.

The issue here is not that we are required to match the relevant civilian labor force; the issue is really that the workforce is going to shrink as the Baby Boom retires.

The population will go up, but they will be older and out of the workforce.

The workforce itself shrinks and we want to make sure that we are able to reach all corners of the workforce to have the best chance of getting the people we need.

The picture is much the same in National Cemetery Administration.

They are also underrepresented in four groups: White women, Hispanic men and women, and Asian women.

The Hispanic men is a substantial difference.

Once concern there is whether noncitizen Hispanics inflate the standard.

We're generally underrepresented in only blue collar Hispanic male jobs.

There's some dispute on that but, in any event, we're falling behind the relevant civilian labor force.

There is another problem in NCA: over the last 10 years, NCA is the only group whose diversity has shrunk.

Whites have increased by two percentage points and Hispanics and Blacks have each decreased by one or two percentage points.

This is a long-term trend and may need some fairly aggressive changes in recruitment to reverse.

What this means for our EEO plans is that we need to specify very clearly in the plan what the underrepresented group is so we can focus on it.

We need to look at specific occupations where the group has the most underrepresentation and we need to have specific targeted recruitment plans to try to get the outreach to those groups.

This would include use of special hiring authorities, use of student interns, and all the things at our disposal.

Now we're going to shift to promotions.

There is undoubtedly grade disparity within VA, within the whole Federal government: as the grades go up, the proportions of White go up.

What we're trying to determine is if that is a current practice or if that is the residue of recruiting forty years ago when the civilian labor force was quite different.

This is a picture of the GS 13 to 15 that excludes the doctors and the nurses; it's called a leadership pipeline in VHA.

The promotion rates in light blue are almost identical to the onboard rates—that is, the availability from the grades that these would be promoted from.

In other words, there is—apparently—no systematic bias by race, national origin, and gender in the promotions in VHA in the leadership pipeline.

When we look at one of their major occupations such as RNs, you can see that with the exception of Asian women the match between promotions and availability is almost perfect.

This requires a little more investigation.

We don't know if it's an age issue—perhaps the Asians are just coming in.

We don't know if it's a willingness to take the necessary tests for promotion.

So this is a trigger, not a barrier.

We're not saying there's a problem here; we're saying there's something we need to look into.

Moving to Veterans Benefits, you can see in their leadership pipeline, that the match is almost perfect between the promotion rate and the availability rate in the leadership pipeline.

This is excellent; this is something we should be telling people about because many people feel that there is bias in promotions.

Now, is there bias?

On an individual promotion, I can't tell you.

We can look at the numbers and see that systematically there's not, but that doesn't mean that people don't have concerns for their individual position.

So let's look at the largest occupation, which is veterans claims examiners, and I have to say that, compared to the availability, this is about the most perfect match I've ever seen between promotions and whose there to promote.

It looks like, in this regard, in general, VBA's doing an excellent job.

I'm not going to show you the slide for NCA, the Administration is small and the number of promotions in the leadership pipeline is so tiny that the numbers really don't support trend analysis but, in general inspection, it looks like there's are proportionate as well.

I would, however, like to talk about the promotion rate for people with targeted disabilities.

In the chart on the left, you can see that people with no disability are promoted at well above availability rates.

In the cart on the right, you can see that VA-wide, people with targeted disabilities are promoted at below availability levels.

This is true in the leadership pipeline on the far right; in the double-grade promotion jobs—5, 7, 9, 11—in the center; and in the single grade promotion—5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and so on—on the left of the chart on the right.

This is clearly a trigger, that's EEO speak for it's a data anomaly.

We don't yet know if there's a barrier or a problem yet and it's a little hard to tell on the face of this one because the number of people with targeted disabilities in the leadership pipeline is quite small and we don't know if they are maxed out in the grade they're in, if they are not being promoted, or what's going on so we're going to have to look at this closely with numbers this small, one person this way or that can make it look like a big difference when, in fact, it's not.

For example, in veterans claims examiners, the occupation with the largest proportion of targeted disabilities in the leadership pipeline, the numbers are right on the money.

They expected 55 promotions of people with targeted disabilities and the actual was, in fact, 55.

Other occupations vary from 17 below to two above the expected number.

The only real outlier is the 17 below, which is miscellaneous clerk and assistants—series 303—where they promoted 50 and expected 67; other than that, almost all of the differences are in the plus or minus one or two range or right on the money.

Let's look at the leadership pipeline; this is kind of a new measure, let me explain how this works.

The yellow is the people who are in grades, GS grades, 14 and 15.

The blue is the people who are in supervisory-level jobs 1, 2, 3, or 4.

These levels have been cleaned in the workforce data and the Administrations are very confident that they are accurate.

What this shows me is that there is a very close match between availability in the pool grades and appointment to high leadership jobs.

This speaks well for VA.

On the other end of the scale, when you look at career improvement—now, this is GS grades 1 through 9 only, it looks at how many people there are by race and national origin and gender and then compares that to the proportion who moved to a different occupation with better prospects, that is a higher average grade.

There's almost perfect correspondence.

What that tells me is that we are doing a good job of getting the word out to lower-graded GS employees about the promotion capabilities that are available to them, the training that's available to them, and some of them are changing occupations for a better career; we've had that in our office, I've seen it a number of secretarial positions moved to administration or professional positions.

This speaks very well for VA.

So what this means in total is that, looking across VA, the promotion rates are very, very close to availability rates.

There is no systematic bias in the promotions.

Does this mean we're going to stay looking just the way we are as everybody moves proportionately?

No, I don't think so because age is going to affect retirement differentially by race.

Let's look at the VHA leadership pipeline.

You can see that White men in blue are clearly the dominant group above age 55, the black vertical line, and are going to be retiring rapidly.

You can see that most people don't stay past 65.

White women are behind them; it's a similar graph, but they're about five years behind, so White women are going to become the most dominant group in the GS leadership pipeline.

Looking at the minority men in orange and the minority women in green, you can see that the predominant presence of these groups is under 55 so as the older-than-55 people retire, the proportion of minorities and White women is going to increase in the leadership pipeline as they get promoted up.

Remember, we just saw that the promotion rates are unbiased.

The one thing that troubles me here is that the proportion of minority men is relatively low compared to minority women.

If we are going to reach grade parity, it will require having sufficient minority men in place to take advantage of the promotions that will result from the retirement of the older White men and women.

Okay, looking at VBA, the picture is the same, but perhaps even more dramatic.

You can see that the majority of White men in blue are already above retirement eligibility and drop off rapidly.

That means that, within a few years, White women will clearly be the predominant group in VBA leadership pipeline.

The interesting thing here is the minority women in green are essentially equal to the White men in blue below retirement age but the minority men are well below, well below, the representation of minority women.

This is, again, an area that VBA may want to look into to make sure that the training is available for people to be ready for promotions.

Okay, in NCA the picture is a little different.

White men are clearly the predominant group there.

White women are well below them at every age group until you get down to 25 or 30.

Minority women do not have much presence above age 55, but there is a good number below retirement age and they will become an increasingly important factor; for several years, they will be a bigger group than White women.

Minority men, again, seem low.

The majority of them are about Baby Boom age—the peak there in the orange line—which means that, over the next few years, their proportion will diminish, again something that NCA should be looking into, particularly in light of their declining diversity overall.

All in all, I think this is a pretty good picture and speaks well for fair employment practices in VA.

Thomas: That's all we have time for in this edition of Diversity News.

We appreciate your watching, and we hope you'll tune in again next month.

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Until next time...

Both Yvonne and Thomas: Have a GREAT month!