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Report to Secretary, Department of the Air Force; by H. L. Krieger, Director, Federal Personnel and Compensation Div.

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In June 1976 the Department of the Air Force issued an Upward Mobility Training Agreement to enhance employees' upward mobility opportunities. A review was conducted of the progress of the Upward Mobility Program at the departmental level and at three field activities. Findings/Conclusions: Field activities are reporting Upward Mobility costs in an inconsistent manner, and lack of departmental guidelines has resulted in reporting inaccurate and incomplete Upward Mobility program costs. The Air Force Training Agreement emphasizes that participants should be selected in accordance with local merit promotion principles. The way in which ranking is used for selecting Upward Mobility participants is not effective, and individuals without the necessary knowledge of Upward Mobility career fields are serving on interview panels. Recommendations: The Air Force should: develop guidelines which insure that program costs are collected and reported completely and accurately; issue guidelines emphasizing the need to monitor supervisory appraisal scores of employees' current performance, take steps to insure that knowledgeable panel members are selected; and insure that effective ranking factors are used to select Upward Mobility participants. (RRS)



*UNITED STATES
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE*

**Upward Mobility Using
Job Restructuring**

Department of the Air Force

Recent actions by the Air Force should improve its Upward Mobility programs. However, additional improvements can be made by providing guidelines on collecting and reporting Upward Mobility costs and by making sure that the effective ranking factors are used to select Upward Mobility participants.



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
COMPENSATION DIVISION

B-70896(4)

The Honorable
The Secretary of the Air Force

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We recently completed a limited review of the progress of the Department of the Air Force's Upward Mobility program. Upward Mobility program efforts were reviewed at the Department level and at three field activities. We also examined departmental and field activity policies, procedures, and guidelines issued on Upward Mobility as well as program evaluation procedures.

Our Government-wide review of Upward Mobility programs in 1973 and 1974 led to issuance of an April 1975 report to the Congress entitled "Upward Mobility Programs in the Federal Government Should Be Made More Effective" (FPCD-75-84). This review included the Department's Upward Mobility program. On May 20, 1974, we discussed with Air Force officials various problems which existed in the Department's program. At that time, the Department had not issued guidelines on Upward Mobility.

Recent Department actions should improve its Upward Mobility program. In June 1976 the Department issued an Air Force-wide Upward Mobility Training Agreement to enhance employees' Upward Mobility opportunities and Upward Mobility guidelines which requires program planning and management commitment. Issuance of these guidelines represents an attempt to improve the Air Force's Upward Mobility program, but implementation of the guidelines will largely determine the success of the program.

We believe additional improvements can be made by

- providing guidelines on collecting and reporting Upward Mobility costs and
- insuring that effective ranking factors are used to select Upward Mobility participants.

These matters are discussed in detail in appendixes I and II of this letter. A third appendix is also included which contains recommendations to improve the Upward Mobility training program at the Aeronautical Systems Division, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. In our opinion, adoption of the recommendations would strengthen the Department's Upward Mobility efforts. These suggestions were discussed with Air Force officials.

We would appreciate being advised of any actions planned or taken concerning our recommendations. As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written response on actions taken on our recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations not later than 60 days after the date of the report and the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

We are sending copies of this letter to the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare; the House Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Equal Opportunities; and the Civil Service Commission.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesy extended to us by Department officials during our visit. If you wish to discuss the above issues or need further information, please let me know.

Sincerely yours,

H. L. Krieger

H. L. Krieger
Director

NEED TO IMPROVE COLLECTING
AND REPORTING UPWARD
MOBILITY COST DATA

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) requires Federal agencies to report in their annual affirmative action plans all costs of formal and on-the-job training concerning Upward Mobility program efforts. Also, each year agency Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) officials are required by Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-11 to report the costs of internal EEO programs, including Upward Mobility. The circular requires that the report include a concise description of the program, significant cost-effectiveness or other analytic findings, pertinent comments concerning reliability of the data, and actions planned to improve data collection.

Air Force officials are aware of problems being encountered in collecting and reporting A-11 Upward Mobility costs. For example, a department of Defense-wide meeting was held in 1975 to discuss development of annual budget estimates for the OMB A-11 report. According to the Chief of the Air Force's EEO office, participants at that meeting had varying definitions of which cost elements should be included as Upward Mobility costs.

In addition to varying definitions on which costs should be included, the costs that were reported were not always accurate. Despite these inaccuracies, Air Force officials never told CSC of the reliability problems as required. In addition, the Air Force's 1974 and 1975 A-11 submissions to CSC did not contain narrative statements regarding data reliability or data collection problems.

Despite these shortcomings, guidelines have not been issued to field activities to insure that costs are collected and reported in a uniform manner for either affirmative action plan or OMB A-11 reporting purposes. As a result, field activities are reporting Upward Mobility costs in an inconsistent manner.

One field activity, for example, reported about \$60,000 as the cost of its 1975 Upward Mobility program. A cooperative educational program comprised about 40 percent of this amount. A cognizant official admitted that this should not have been included as Upward Mobility program costs. On the other hand, neither on-the-job training nor administrative

costs were reported, although such costs were recognized as being elements of Upward Mobility.

Another field activity reported about \$2,500 as the cost of its 1975 Upward Mobility program. These costs consisted of the estimated administrative staff salaries for supporting and administering the Upward Mobility program. Direct costs for Upward Mobility training were not included although CSC guidelines require that such costs be included in agency submissions.

Officials at two field activities told us that inaccurate reporting of Upward Mobility program costs resulted from a lack of departmental guidelines.

Conclusions and recommendations

Lack of departmental guidelines has resulted in reporting inaccurate and incomplete Upward Mobility program costs.

We recommend, therefore, that the Secretary of the Air Force direct appropriate program officials to develop guidelines which insure that Upward Mobility costs are collected and reported completely and accurately. These guidelines should also require that Air Force responses to CSC address the problems of data collection and reliability.

NEED TO INSURE EFFECTIVENESS OF
RANKING FACTORS FOR SELECTING
UPWARD MOBILITY PARTICIPANTS

The Air Force Training Agreement emphasizes that participants should be selected in accordance with local merit promotion principles. According to the Air Force's merit promotion program guidelines, each installation must establish a promotion evaluation pattern which identifies the ranking factors to be used in evaluating employees for selection.

Upward Mobility programs at the three field activities used a variety of ranking factors, including supervisory appraisals, panel interviews, and tests. A training, education, and experience (TRAEX) score was also used as a ranking factor in certain Upward Mobility programs. Although these factors were in accordance with the merit promotion program, we believe the way in which these factors were used may inhibit their effectiveness in the selection process.

Supervisory appraisal scores

The Air Force's merit promotion program guidelines state that supervisory appraisals of current employee performance are an important factor in the selection process. These appraisals are designed to evaluate employee performance, work habits, and attitudes.

Since supervisory appraisal scores are an important factor in the selection process, they should accurately show an employee's performance. Supervisory appraisal scores, however, tended to favor certain groups of employees. For example, in one field activity we analyzed supervisory appraisal scores for employees in the secretarial and clerical appraisal patterns because many employees competing for entry into Upward Mobility programs at this activity are rated under these patterns. In November 1974 approximately 20 percent of all secretarial employees received perfect appraisal scores while only 4 percent of all clerical employees received perfect scores. Since supervisory appraisal scores are a primary selection factor, it appears that secretaries could have a competitive advantage over clerical employees for selection into Upward Mobility programs.

This problem may be further compounded because there was a tendency for supervisors at this activity to gradually inflate appraisal scores, as in the following:

<u>Percent with perfect appraisal scores</u>		
<u>Employees</u>	<u>June 1976</u>	<u>1974</u>
Secretarial	31	20
Clerical	8	4

Although officials recognized that the disproportionate appraisal scores caused problems in the selection process, no corrective action has been taken.

Selection of panel members

Air Force guidelines require that evaluation of candidates' potential include a review from one or more managers or supervisors who have knowledge of the characteristics needed to participate successfully in the training program and to perform successfully in the developmental position. Such a review can be made through the use of a panel interview.

Although two of the field activities we visited used the panel interview as a ranking factor, only one of the field activities issued guidelines for selecting its panel members. According to its guidelines, one of the primary considerations used in appointing panel members was their knowledge of the target career fields. Panel members were supposed to be subject matter experts, which was defined as either managers or journeyman specialists in those career fields targeted for Upward Mobility participants.

We reviewed position descriptions on 24 of the 124 individuals who had served on or were eligible to serve on Upward Mobility panels, because these individuals did not appear to be in career fields meeting the selection criteria for panel membership. Our review showed the following:

- Seven individuals did not appear to be subject matter experts. Two individuals, although in a target d Upward Mobility career field, were not at the journeyman level. The other five individuals included a physicist, a mathematician, an operations research analyst,

an accountant, and an aerospace engineer. None of their career fields were targeted for Upward Mobility, and nothing in their position descriptions indicated they had interaction with Upward Mobility career fields.

--Twelve individuals were questionable subject matter experts. These individuals were working in such diversified career fields as electrical engineering, mathematics, mechanical engineering, metallurgy, general engineering, systems engineering, aerospace engineering, engineering psychology, and operations research. None of their career fields were targeted for Upward Mobility. An analysis of their position descriptions revealed that these individuals had only limited interface with career fields targeted for Upward Mobility.

--Five individuals, while in career fields different from those targeted for Upward Mobility, appeared to have enough interaction with Upward Mobility career fields to be eligible for panel membership.

According to cognizant officials, the primary reason for not strictly adhering to field activity panel selection criteria was the inability to schedule panel interviews at times convenient to the panel members.

In our opinion, additional steps should be taken to insure that panel members are selected from those occupational career fields targeted for Upward Mobility. Otherwise, panelists may not be fully aware of the prerequisites needed for the Upward Mobility career field.

Written tests and use of TRAEX

Air Force merit promotion program guidelines state that written tests may be used as a primary ranking factor in the selection process. The Air Force-wide Upward Mobility Training Agreement states that written tests may be used to evaluate potential if they are not used as the sole screening factor for selection. Two of the field activities we reviewed used written tests as a ranking factor in selecting participants for certain Upward Mobility programs.

We reviewed the use of the written test for the program having the largest number of program participants. Scores received on the Professional and Administrative Career Examination (PACE) were used as a ranking factor in determining eligibility for potential career positions such as budget analysts, contract negotiators, and personnel specialists. PACE scores received by individuals were doubled and added to supervisory appraisal and panel interview scores. The total scores were then used to establish numerically ordered registers of eligible candidates.

Field activity officials said their only rationale for doubting the PACE score was to deemphasize the importance of the score received on the panel interview. The maximum score that an individual receives on the unweighted PACE is 100 points, while a maximum of 245 points is possible from the panel interview. Studies have not been conducted to validate whether the use of double-weighted scores was valid. Additionally, neither the Upward Mobility promotion evaluation pattern nor the merit promotion plan indicated that scores were to be weighted.

Since studies have not been conducted to justify use of the weighting procedures for PACE scores, we reranked two of the registers by using supervisory appraisal scores, panel interview scores, and single-weighted PACE scores. Single weighting of PACE scores produced some major shifts on the registers. For example, individuals' positions on the registers changed from 5th to 14th place, 19th to 8th place, 9th to 2d place, and 18th to 31st place. Although we are not implying that a single-weighted PACE score is more valid than a double-weighted score, such weighting should be both validated and publicized before it is used.

The Air Force merit promotion program guidelines also require that TRAEX ratings be used when a test is not used as a ranking factor. When tests are used in ranking, TRAEX ratings are optional, but whenever practical, application of TRAEX as an additional measure is recommended.

Although we did not evaluate TRAEX scores for the individuals discussed above, we believe that TRAEX should be considered as an additional ranking factor, even when written tests are used. Use of the TRAEX score may be especially beneficial to those otherwise qualified for Upward Mobility but who do not do well on written tests. Air Force officials agreed with our observation.

Conclusions and recommendations

The way in which ranking is used for selecting Upward Mobility participants is not effective. Also, individuals without the necessary knowledge of Upward Mobility career fields were selected to serve on interview panels. We recommend that the Secretary of the Air Force direct appropriate program officials to:

- Issue guidelines emphasizing the need to monitor supervisory appraisal scores of employees' current performance.
- Take steps to insure selection of panel members who are knowledgeable of the characteristics necessary for successful performance in Upward Mobility training positions.
- Insure that weights, where used in ranking, are valid and publicized.
- Consider requiring TRAEX as a ranking factor even if written tests are used.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN THE UPWARD MOBILITYTRAINING PROGRAM AT HEADQUARTERS,
AERONAUTICAL SYSTEMS DIVISION,
WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE

CSC has suggested that agencies consider formal training programs offered in non-Government facilities as one method of providing training and educational opportunities to Upward Mobility program participants. Training programs in support of Upward Mobility are to be in accordance with chapter 41, title 5, U.S.C.

The Aeronautical Systems Division (ASD) at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base emphasized formal training programs in support of Upward Mobility. Many of these courses were offered in non-Government facilities. While the ASD program provided participants additional advancement opportunities, improvements can be made in several areas to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of training in support of Upward Mobility. The areas requiring improvements are discussed in the remainder of this appendix.

Need to relate training to
manpower needs and
established target jobs

According to 5 U.S.C. 41, agencies must (1) determine their manpower needs before enrolling employees in training programs, (2) insure that fully trained employees are identified and given first consideration for these needs, and (3) identify target jobs to insure that training is related to present or potential job duties within the agency. Upward Mobility training provided at Government expense must be integrated with manpower and staffing plans.

Under its PACE Upward Mobility program, ASD offers Upward Mobility training to qualified individuals for whom specific target jobs have not been established. This training is being offered even though ASD's systems to identify manpower and training needs appear weak.

ASD's training needs are not being systematically identified. A recent evaluation by ASD's Major Command noted that training needs were not related to work force assessment, organizational, and mission changes or work requirement changes. Officials told us that annual training-needs surveys were not conducted.

In addition, ASD manpower needs are not being fully identified. Although we requested information identifying relative manpower needs by grade level and occupation for general schedule employees between 1973 and 1975, ASD officials could provide us with only gross statistics for 1975. They were unable to provide specific information on skill needs by grade level because there was no formalized procedure to project employment needs by specific skills and grades. Officials told us that they were unable to project these needs and that they considered such manpower planning to be nothing more than a paperwork exercise.

While training and manpower needs have not been fully defined, ASD currently offers Upward Mobility training to qualified individuals for whom specific target jobs have not been established under its PACE Upward Mobility program. Eligible personnel under this program may have non-job-related training approved if the following conditions are met: (1) they are in the top one-third of the register and (2) training is related to agency needs. This training is not aimed at enhancing the participant's qualifications for a potential target position.

Instead, ASD officials believe the training is justified on the basis that it will enhance the participant's competitiveness some time after being selected for a specific target position. In addition, a participant may be selected for a position completely different from the position he is trained for.

Since there is no relationship among manpower planning, systematic identification of target jobs, and training needs, such training may be inefficient and ineffective because there is no assurance that an individual receiving training will be selected for a position within any of the target career fields.

Need to improve controls over
formal training through use of
career development plans

A career development plan outlines the job progress for an employee including the training and experience required to qualify for a designated job. CSC guidelines suggest developing such plans for employees engaged in certain training and education activities. The plan should be based on a careful analysis of the employee's needs and the future needs of the agency and should be developed before placing

the participant in the target field. Experiences and training courses required for successful performance in the targeted career field should be included in this plan. The employee, supervisor, and personnel officials should all participate in development of the plan.

According to Air Force regulations on employee training and development, requests for training are not to be authorized if the requested course does not appear in a written plan. Moreover, according to 1974 guidelines issued by ASD, personnel selected for positions in the Administrative/Technical Career Upward Mobility program were to have a formal career development plan if formal training was required.

We reviewed selected personnel information on 25 individuals in this Upward Mobility program to determine whether they had current career development plans. Of the 25 individuals, 4 did not have current career development plans and 6 had no career development plans. Of the 12 individuals who received college courses, 8 received courses which were not specifically identified in their career development plans. In each of these instances, the training authorizations said the courses were part of a career development plan. Four of these individuals had no career development plans even though numerous training authorizations showed that such courses were part of the individual's career development plan.

In November 1975 ASD also developed a list of college courses that were available to clerical personnel. These courses were to be approved if a valid job-related justification existed. The purpose of this program was to assist the clerical work force in broadening career opportunities. Among the courses offered were psychology and sociology. We reviewed 31 training authorizations justifying courses in psychology and sociology. In every instance except one, the training authorizations stated that such training was part of a career development plan. Only 9 of the 30 individuals had career development plans which showed a training need for either psychology or sociology. Most of the remaining individuals did not have career development plans at the time these authorizations were approved.

ASD officials knew that many individuals receiving formal training did not have individual career plans. They told us that the basic problem was caused by supervisors not fulfilling their career counseling responsibilities.

Although supervisors may not be fulfilling their counseling responsibilities, we believe that training officials should be making greater efforts to insure that formal training is needed and that each employee receiving formal training has an individual career development plan relating training to a specific need.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While ASD offered a variety of undergraduate academic training to support Upward Mobility for many lower level Air Force employees, controls to insure that the programs are effective and efficient and are not in violation of 5 U.S.C. 41 do not exist. The Air Force's recently issued Upward Mobility guidance does not properly address these problems.

We recommend, therefore, that the Secretary of the Air Force require appropriate ASD program officials to:

- Insure that ASD systematically determines appropriate target positions before specific training courses are approved.
- Develop individual career development plans for all Upward Mobility candidates detailing required formal training before commencing such training.