

Job Performance Comparisons: Mexican-American and Anglo Employees

✿ UNPARALLELED EFFORTS have been made in recent years to persuade American businessmen to find jobs for the disadvantaged. The first large-scale effort toward such employment came in 1961 with the Plans for Progress program. The Civil Rights Act and the Manpower Development Training Act have intensified the effort. It is now clearly illegal to discriminate in any feature of employment if a business is covered by the federal legislation. Partnerships between government and business have been formed to train and hire the disadvantaged. Programs such as Job Corps, JOBS, CEP, CAMPS, and SER have become only too familiar to the businessman.

Pressures to increase the employment of the disadvantaged are viewed with doubt and concern by many businessmen. It is well understood that the disadvantaged possess characteristics which do not suit them for productive employment. They lack adequate education and skill and often have health problems and police records. Therefore, businessmen face a serious dilemma: they may wish to meet their social responsibilities to the disadvantaged, and yet they feel they cannot hire inferior employees and remain competitive.

In the states which border Mexico, federal and state agencies are encouraging businessmen to hire more Mexican-Americans. These people, considered as a whole, possess all the traits common to the disadvantaged: high rates of unemployment and underemployment, low levels of education, low incomes, high rates of crime, and high rates of morbidity. It is thought that an additional handicap to the economic and occupational advancement of the Mexican-American is the influence of the traditional Mexican culture and social organization. Among the alleged cultural hindrances are a lack of strong future orientation, inconspicuous rather than conspicuous consumption norms, noncompetitive values, and obligations to family placed above individual advancement.¹ Whether or not his disadvantaged status or the alleged hindrances of his background are responsible, the Mexican-American has clearly not achieved his proportionate share of employment. The U.S. Equal Employment Commission reports that 800 national companies with operations in the Southwest and West do not hire a single Mexican-American.² Data from the 1960 census show a dramatic underrepresentation of Mexican-Americans in the better job categories.

Focus of this Study

This study reports on the job performance of a number of Mexican-American employees. It seeks to supply evidence on their performance once they have been absorbed into business. The job performance of Mexican-Americans was compared with that of non-Mexican-Americans in the same occupations in the same organizations. Efficiency ratings and objective indicators of job performance were obtained from the personnel records of the employing organizations. Variables such as age, marital status, and amount of education were controlled to determine the extent to which observed differences in job performance could be attributed to these variables rather than directly to Mexican-American background.

The organizations in which the study was conducted are located in San Antonio, Texas, a city well-suited for a comparison of Anglos and Mexican-Americans. It is located less than 200 miles from the Mexican border and continually receives immigrants from Mexico and migrants from the border areas of Texas. The Mexican-American population of some 300,000 people (about 45 percent of the population of the urbanized area) includes persons of all stages of acculturation, but a large majority are profoundly affected by the traditional Mexican culture. Factors retarding acculturation include the continual exposure to Mexican values through contact with Mexicans, residential segregation which limits contact with the Anglo community, the size of the Mexican-American community, and the median level of education and income. Census data, health statistics, and arrest rates clearly reflect the profoundly disadvantaged social and economic position of the Mexican-Americans of San Antonio.

Methods

For comparisons of Mexican-American and Anglo job performance, data on the following samples were obtained: clerical workers at the United States Post Office, female sales clerks at a large department store, maintenance employees at the San Antonio Housing Authority, and policemen and firemen employed by the City of San Antonio.³ The samples were divided into Mexican-American and non-Mexican-American on the basis of surname or information supplied by supervisors. It would have been desirable to exclude Negroes from the samples in

order to make direct comparisons between Mexican-Americans and Anglos, but it was impossible to identify and exclude them. However, we could determine that they were such a small percentage of the non-Mexican-American samples that their inclusion could have little effect on the data.

For each of the samples except the sales clerks, the comparison was made on the basis of proclivity to take sick leave and annual leave. It was hypothesized that the Mexican-American employees would take more of both. A high rate of illness may induce the employee to be absent because he is ill or because a member of his family is ill. The Mexican-American's alleged lack of concern for the future may persuade him to use leave time rather than to save it for future needs, as the Anglo is thought to do.

Additional measures of job performance for the policemen and firemen are promotion test scores, efficiency ratings, and percentages who sought promotion by taking the promotion test. Such alleged influences as lack of competitive values and relative lack of future orientation predict that the Mexican-American would not perform as well as the Anglo on these measures.

It was possible to deal directly with the most important product of the retail sales clerks' job performance: their dollar volume of sales. This was a valuable comparison, but its meaning was weakened somewhat by many of the less well-aculturated Mexican-American customers preferring to be waited on by a Spanish-speaking clerk. Since many Anglo clerks did not speak Spanish, this gave the Mexican-American clerks an obvious advantage that might have offset any culturally based handicap.

The final measurement of differential job performance was accident rates. Accident records were available for policemen and firemen and for maintenance employees. In addition to such probable influences as poor health, culture conflict and the consequent personality maladjustments might lead Mexican-Americans to have higher accident rates. It has been suggested that psychological conflicts and maladjustment may be among the causes of accidents.⁴ If the Mexican-American's acculturation into American life is not going smoothly, he may react to it with anger, impatience, or carelessness. Such reactions would set the stage for accidents.

It is important to point out that controls such as age, amount of education, seniority, rank of job, and

marital status were applied when the requisite data were available, when the two groups differed appreciably on the control variable, and when the control variables were found to be closely associated with job performance.

Findings

Proclivity to take leave.—Information on sick leave and annual leave was gathered on the maintenance employees in 1966, on the clerks at the U.S. Post Office in 1966, and on the policemen and firemen in 1965 and 1966.

Among 54 Mexican-American and 29 Anglo maintenance employees, the Mexican-Americans took less sick leave. The difference was statistically significant at less than the five percent level. There was no statistically significant difference between the amounts of annual leave taken. No control information was available on these employees.

Among 198 Mexican-American and 207 Anglo clerks, the former took less sick leave, but the difference was not statistically significant. Control of education and marital status were not needed because the difference between the mean levels of education was very small and the percentage of sick leave taken was the same for the married and single clerks. When amount of sick leave taken was compared at different ages and seniority levels, no differences were observed except at the very lowest levels. The slightly higher amount of sick leave taken by younger Mexican-Americans at the lower levels of seniority was not statistically significant.

Information on sick leave and annual leave was available on 160 Mexican-American and 488 Anglo police officers and for 222 and 314 firemen. The Mexican-Americans took slightly more sick leave and annual leave, but the differences fell short of statistical significance and were not large enough to be important even if they did not result from chance. Age, education, seniority, and rank of job differed but slightly and therefore, by the rule of thumb usually employed, could have been ignored. Controls were run anyway to test for interaction, and there was no systematic variation in the Mexican-American/Anglo differences from the lower to

the higher ranks and levels of age, education, and seniority.

Efficiency ratings and promotion test scores of policemen and firemen.⁵—Scores were obtained on all promotion tests and efficiency reports for November and December of 1966 and January and February of 1967 for the policemen and for 1966 for the firemen. This represented, for Mexican-Americans and Anglos respectively, 85 and 218 for policemen and 45 and 54 for firemen. For both the policemen and firemen, the mean efficiency ratings were virtually the same for both groups, and this was also true at each rank and level of age, education, and seniority. The Anglo policemen averaged higher than the Mexican-Americans, but the reverse was true for firemen. Neither of the differences was significant at the five percent level. When the control variables were applied, a great majority of the comparisons revealed a difference in the same direction as the zero-order differences. The controls revealed a tendency for the Mexican-Americans to fare better in relation to the Anglos at the higher levels of education. This may have resulted from little more than a slight language handicap among the less well-educated Mexican-Americans.

Among both the policemen and firemen, the Mexican-Americans seemed to have been at least as ambitious as the Anglos. A greater percentage of Mexican-Americans than Anglos sought promotion by taking the promotion test, but this is not conclusive evidence that they were more ambitious because at most ranks they were slightly older and had greater seniority. Their greater tendency to seek promotion may have been more a matter of impatience than of ambition. Among those seeking promotions at each rank, the Mexican-Americans and Anglos had about the same average amount of seniority.

Accident Rates.⁶—From January 1962 through March 1967 there were 167 on-the-job accidents among the maintenance employees involving a loss of 5,134 hours of employee time and a cost of \$8,407.55 in salaries paid to employees while off the job because of accidents. A comparison was made between Mexican-Americans and Anglos on contribution to the total number of on-the-job accidents,



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or involvement in on-the-job accidents which produced a cost in employee hours off the job, and on average number of hours lost because of accidents. None of the differences between the groups was significant at the five percent level or beyond.

From December 10, 1965, through December 25, 1966, 207 policemen and 90 firemen were reported to have been involved in accidents. The Mexican-American policemen and firemen were not involved in accidents to any greater extent than would have been expected from their representations in the two departments. In some cases the policemen or firemen were involved in more than one accident during the period. A comparison on accident proneness showed no statistically significant difference.

Performance ratings and sales volume of retail sales clerks.—From 1963 through 1966, performance ratings were obtained on sales clerks: 44 Mexican-American and 43 Anglo on incentives and for 115 and 125, respectively, not on incentives. Supervisors rated performance on the basis of salesmanship, stock keeping, error record, absence record, dependability, and the like. The advantage of the bilingual clerks in dealing with Spanish-speaking customers would not necessarily result in a higher performance rating based on these factors. However, all but one of the eight comparisons for each year and for each category of clerks favored the Mexican-Americans. None of the differences was statistically significant, yet it is clear that the supervisors, a majority of whom are Anglos, did not consider the Mexican-Americans to be inferior employees.

There were 44 Spanish surname and 46 other female clerks for whom sales data were obtained for 1965 and 1966. As might be expected, the average daily sales volume was consistently greater for the Mexican-Americans,⁷ and the difference held up under controls for education and marital status.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that when Mexican-Americans and Anglos with the same formal

qualifications for employment are compared, there is little difference between their job performances. When the Mexican-Americans meet the requirements for induction into intermediate-level clerical, sales, and service jobs, their performance apparently is not hindered by their disadvantaged background or by any influences of the Mexican rural-folk culture.

Perhaps the most important implication of this study is that the disadvantaged background and alleged cultural handicap of the Mexican-Americans apparently are not valid reasons for discrimination in employment and promotion. It is clear that the Mexican-American population represents a source of capable, worthwhile employees. Therefore, businessmen should be able to cooperate with federal and state programs to train and hire Mexican-Americans without deviating from rational business practices.

REFERENCES

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2. Ray Shaw, "Overlooked Minority," *Wall Street Journal*, 37 (May 3, 1966), p. 1.
3. For permitting access to personnel data, the authors are indebted to Mr. Clyde C. McCollough, Director of Personnel, City of San Antonio, and to a number of others who prefer to remain anonymous.
4. For a discussion of this hypothesis, see Marion S. Schulzinger, *The Accident Syndrome* (Springfield: Thomas, 1956), pp. 183-184.
5. See Charles N. Weaver, "A Comparative Study of the Job Performance of Spanish-Surname Police Officers in San Antonio, Texas," *Phylon* (Spring 1969), 27-33.
6. See Charles N. Weaver, "Accidents as a Measure of the Cultural Adjustment of Mexican-Americans," *The Sociological Quarterly*, forthcoming.
7. Since the days worked by any one clerk are not independent of one another, no test of significance is applicable to the reported means.

Those interested in the foregoing article are referred to Volume XI No. 4 and XII No. 1 of the *California Management Review*. Back issues are \$3.00 each. Readers may also be interested in the article, "Business and the Mexican-American Community," by Frederick Sturdivant, Volume XI No. 3.

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