

Notes from Panel Discussion: *Executive Development Across Sectors*
OPM Thought Leader Forum
April 10, 2007

Perspectives on Mobility

Commerce Department - a mobility initiative with mixed results

Objectives/motivations for reassigning executives:

- Develop the Service and the careers of individual executives
- Resolve “unevenness” by assigning stronger managers to weaker organizations
- Target assignment of executives who see and attack problems differently
- Excite executives with challenges showing their abilities can be broadly used
- Foster more collegiality and diversity – increase conversation
- Make a bold statement – counteract calcification, reject complacency
- Encourage executives to own responsibility to develop a “seed” corps
- Remove artificial barriers to developing new executive talent – no “grey” ceiling

Result – Eventually reassigned 33 out of 177 executives

- Initial expectation that executives would support mobility was quickly dispelled
- Most executives thought they were being singled out or punished
- One, dissatisfied with assignment, alleged discrimination – without success
- Another initially threatened to sue but afterwards appreciated the opportunity
- Only 4 executives ever said they thought it was a good thing

Contrast – practice in Pfizer – a company with 22,000 people worldwide

- Always searching for talent - mobility a recognized tool for developing leaders
- Mobility seen as the best pipeline development strategy and people don't mind it
- It helps that Pfizer has tools to assist with moves that Government does not have

Mobility at the Department of State – Foreign Service vs. Civil Service

Foreign Service, largest component, operates under the Foreign Service Act of 1980

- Not unlike the military, Foreign Service has an “Up or Out” policy
- Individuals who do not progress are eventually retired
- Mobility, both domestic and international, is a key to success
- Mobility is also increasingly a strategy to develop leadership skills

Civil Service

SES is small relative to Foreign Service – only about 145 executives

Much less mobility among SES members – no structured mobility program
Strongest executives place themselves on a broader track by choosing mobility
Rank-in-person diminishes need to move out of comfort zone – less dynamic
Pay-for-performance is best motivator in recent years
Requirement to differentiate performance may help realize promise of the SES

Mobility in the Coast Guard – Military vs. Civil Service

Military – balance is 41,000 military/10,000 civilian

Foreign Service and its international mobility practices may be a good model
Coast Guard is domestically based – officers move among stateside assignments
Must be “bureaucratically multilingual” to operate in civilian and military context
Flag Officers expect movement – tend to have 3 or 4 assignments
Strong belief in keeping people moving to pick up experience
There are no political appointees in the Coast Guard

Senior Executive Service

Previously SES was more of a “continuity force” but this may be changing
Replacing retiring SES – note that many applicants say they are reluctant to move
Coast Guard considering SES/Flag Officer assignment exchanges
Concept fully supported by military officers – SES remains to be seen

Private Sector Example

Mobility

Values-based firm frequently against own financial interests
Uses apprenticeship and mobility to prepare people for advancement
Promotes learning by working with clients and teaching courses
Holds formal training programs every 1 to 1 ½ years
Senior people put in term-limited assignments – expected to find new assignments
Junior people learn through rotation among teams led by different senior staff

What is important to develop in federal leaders?

Private Sector Perspective

Critical challenges:

Threats to international security and peace
Changes in consumer markets, industry structures and talent flows
Blurring of traditional boundaries between agencies
Must use more information in making decisions and do more with less

Critical competencies

Integration – synthesizing vast amounts of information for decision making
Inspiration – to enable people facing greater challenges with fewer resources

Additional Comments

Need to develop in leaders

Ability to develop people – getting the best out of the people they lead
Ability to be flexible, able to shift emphasis, resources and strategy
Understanding of roles and missions of agencies across government

Additional Comments

Need to develop in leaders:

Ability to inspire
Strategic vision
Ability to operate across agency cultures – bureaucratically multi-lingual
Understanding linkages among strategy, policy and budget processes
Understanding how Congress works and its impact

How do you get agreement on vision in executive teams?

First perspective - Military

Commandant seeks to promote thinking with strategic intent among a diverse group

Holds conference with Field Officers, SES and senior enlisted
Open exchange, participation - getting information back to leaders and troops
Rule is – once we have a decision – everybody must be on board
If you cannot support, say so – and be prepared to offer resignation

Second perspective – Civil Service

Senior Executive Service

There is a fiction operating that the SES is not political, which is bunk
Not easy to achieve a single strategic vision; you work towards key objectives
After getting agreement from White House, must work on buy-in from executives
Competing visions – need to corral those interests around President’s vision
Actually helps communication process to have some people question vision
Strategic vision helps to guide but not to achieve complete alignment
You have great people on your side, but there is always the “X factor”

Private Sector

- Unity of company perspective has a positive effect
- Clear measurements and clear rewards result in unified performance
- People respond to the same things, whether in private sector or in government
- It is the leverage people have that causes them to behave differently

Third perspective – Civil Service

Senior Executive Service

- Leadership and inspiration promote teamwork
- Clear leadership, clear cut objectives and goals across bureaus
- Regular meetings with senior leadership team, Foreign Service and politicals
- No sense of difference among services with respect to strategy
- Different views may exist but do not undermine leadership strategy, objectives

Fourth perspective

General

- Single greatest impediment is lack of common ground on what you're trying to do
- Values trade-offs are different in the public and private sectors
- Open discussion of what success looks like is a great way to bring people along
- Two things build a team
- Doing something really well
- Standing up for people in the midst of small failures

Recommendations for Change

Apply the ideas set forth in the "Generation X" Paper

- Require rotations
- Reconsider sabbaticals
- Use rotations out of government and better developmental assignment options
- Assignments both expose executives to new ideas and validate their own competence
- Pair up strong leaders with new leaders
- Make sure the experience of good leaders is shared before they retire

Develop an "acculturation" process, similar to the military "capstone" process, to introduce entry level SES members to common expectations of the Service and to establish relationships.

Echo the need for an acculturation process. State has created a 3 week course for new SES and new SFS members. Need to broaden sense of vision and leadership and imbue new executives with a greater responsibility. Pay for performance and results orientation offers an opportunity.

Need to stabilize the force of leadership. Ask what you can do together. Can 10 or 12 executives work together to accomplish something on leadership issues, to institutionalize growth of leadership in Federal Government?