

In “Keys to Success: Critical Events in the Career Development of African American Managers,” Martin N. Davidson, Marian Ruderman, and Christina A. Douglas explore the differentiating career experiences of African American and white managers in one organization. A multi-faceted study was conducted at a specific company in which managers of each racial/ethnic group were surveyed and a subset of those managers were interviewed about their developmental experiences. Well-documented inequities between African Americans and whites in opportunities for career development were the impetus for the present research. Generally, organizational researchers have found that African Americans, relative to whites, have lower levels of job involvement, access to mentors, and career satisfaction in organizations. African Americans also receive weaker evaluations and fewer promotions than whites. Moreover, there is a great deal of research documenting the extent to which appraisals are conducted unfairly, and the consequences of such behavior can be damaging.

Results focusing on experiences of African American respondents revealed that regardless of race, developmental assignments were cited most as critical experiences in managers’ career development; African American managers identified proportionally fewer instances of developmental assignments than did white managers; African American managers identified proportionally more career learning arising from interactions with other people in the organization than did white managers; and African Americans dealt with developmental obstacles to career advancement related to race more than did white managers. The most frequently cited obstacles included slow advancement in the organization, career role-slotting, inordinately limiting feedback to

African American women, and social isolation among African American men in the organization.

Successful career development results when internal and external networks are established, cultural and racial professional and social support is institutionalized, and white male mentors are present and receptive. We conclude that in spite of these obstacles, African American managers in our sample maintained high levels of performance, professionalism, and motivation to succeed. A thorough analysis of the methods for overcoming those hardships made clear that they are useful not only for generating successful career experiences for African American managers at the company in the study but for all managers. We would recommend that the data described in this research be used as a roadmap for how to effectively develop managers.

To request a copy of the full research paper, please contact Martin at <http://www.leveragingdifference.com/contact/>.