



Equal Opportunity Is Not Always Equal

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The American people have elected their first African American president, a historic event that speaks volumes about the ebbing racist sentiment in the U.S. However, for ethnic minority employees—30 percent of American's human capital—significant societal, educational, cultural and organizational obstacles remain in terms of gainful and meaningful employment.

Research from the Kenexa Research Institute (KRI) demonstrates that past and current policies and practices have not put ethnic minority groups and recent immigrants on equal footing. Further, findings show the U.S. no longer can assume individuals can achieve their goals despite hurdles inherent in U.S. society and its organizations.

There are two central questions: Are career ladders open to all ethnic minorities? If discrepancies exist, where should diversity executives focus their efforts? The KRI 2008 WorkTrends™ survey, which included a random sample of 10,000 U.S. workers, asked 110 questions about employees' opinions about work, including issues of diversity and equal opportunity, such as the full utilization of the organization's talent and EEOC compliance.

Nothing Equal About Work Opportunities

According to WorkTrends data, diversity leaders may want to move from concepts of diversity to diversification. A difference in the ethnic groups' job type profiles is the extent to which they are well-distributed throughout the career ladder (Figure 1).

Some groups disproportionately fill certain jobs in the U.S. Caucasians and Americans Indians have flatter profiles than other ethnic groups, which indicates diversification. Caucasians proportionally fill more professional and clerical roles. Americans Indians work in fewer technical positions and in more middle management positions and in the skilled trades.

More than 20 percent of African Americans are heavily invested in clerical work. They also represent the highest percentage of workers in the laborer category. Asian Americans are disproportionately vested in professional jobs and have the highest incidence of roles in technical positions and as mid-level managers. Some 34 percent of Latin Americans are employed as clerical and sales workers.

Considering the entry requirements of these jobs, there is a pattern. Professional and mid-management jobs have the highest hurdles of the positions listed, and applicants often need a college degree and substantial experience. Certain groups fill these roles, which indicates barriers for other groups that may be embedded in educational, socioeconomic, government visa or work approval systems.

There also are more defined stereotypes surrounding the professional and manager job types, which might validate or contradict cultural ethnic minority stereotypes. For instance, if African Americans typically are perceived as conversationally louder, does that fit as well with the stereotypical definition of professionalism? Or do subversive ideas about soft-spoken Asian Americans contradict a stereotype of a manager who is confrontational and authoritative?

Although saying nothing of overt oppression, the WorkTrends data may be suggesting that implicit ideas of the appropriateness of certain actions and behaviors for various ethnic groups may be influencing people's choices. Perhaps more likely, individuals have a picture of careers available to them and self-select into these. This would indicate stereotypes must be changed early in a child's development and reinforced throughout their education, opening career possibilities long before individuals begin working.

Work-Based Programs

There are 144 million employees wrangling with these problems today. It's up to diversity executives to do what they can to enable, encourage and systematically support all employees in their quest to meet their potential.

The WorkTrends survey asks about seven areas of diversity program effectiveness:

- Organization has a record of recruiting diverse people
- Company makes it easy for people with diverse backgrounds to fit in and be accepted
- Diversity is a part of company culture
- Leadership is committed to diversity

Figure 1: Percentages of Ethnic Groups in Various Job Types

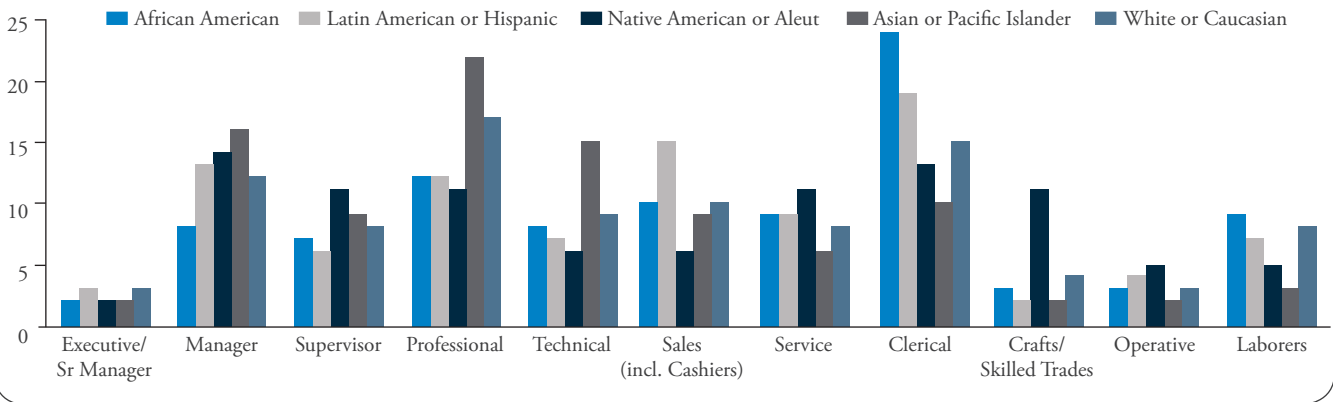


Figure 2: Percent of Employees Who Disagree With Diversity Program Statements

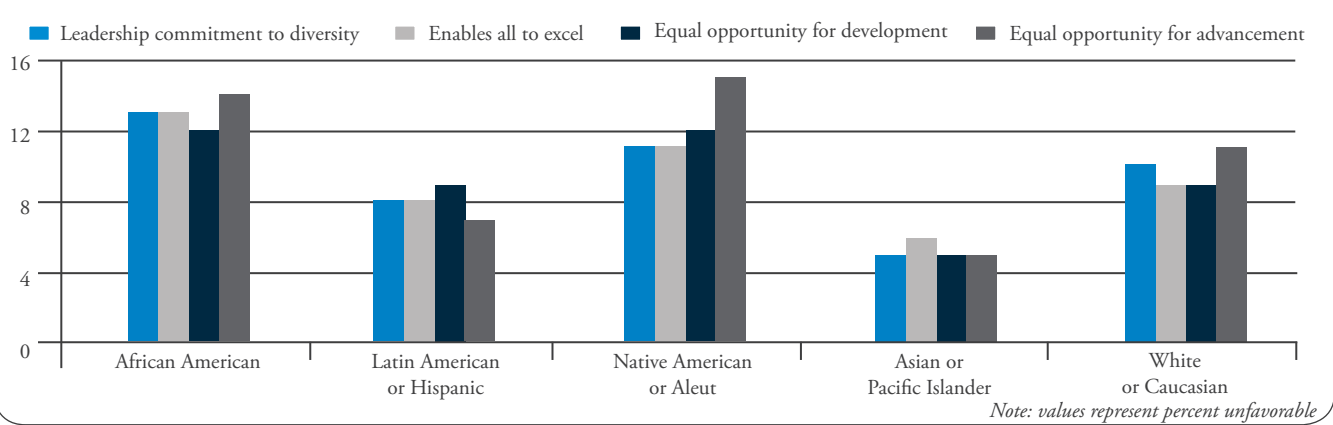


Figure 3: Percent by U.S. Region Agreeing There is Equal Opportunity for Advancement

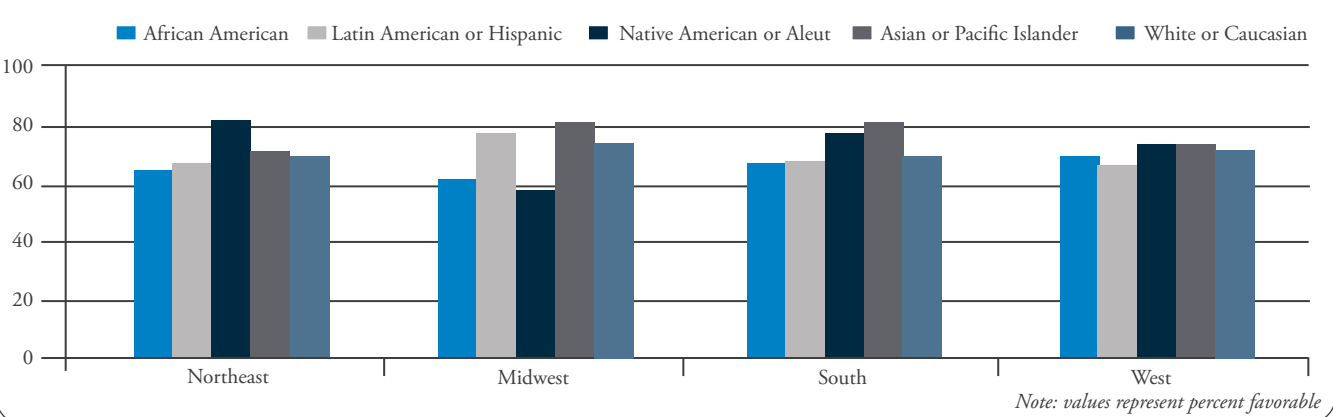
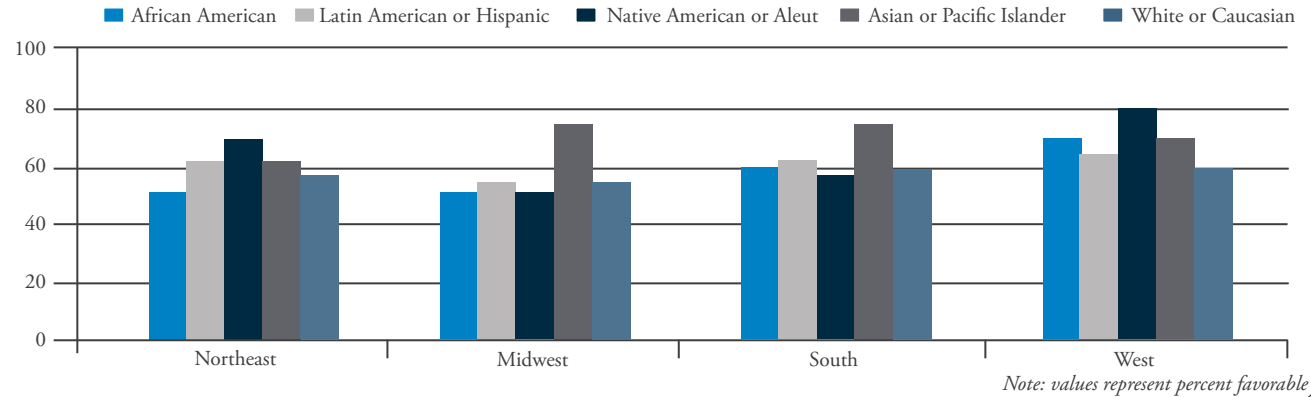


Figure 4: Percent by U.S. Region Agreeing There is Equal Opportunity for Advancement



About Kenexa

Kenexa provides business solutions for human resources. We help global organizations multiply business success by identifying the best individuals for every job and fostering optimal work environments for every organization. For more than 20 years, Kenexa has studied human behavior and team dynamics in the workplace, and has developed the software solutions, business processes and expert consulting that help organizations impact positive business outcomes through HR. Kenexa is the only company that offers a comprehensive suite of unified products and services that support the entire employee lifecycle from pre-hire to exit.

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