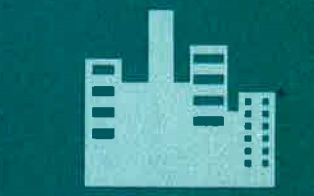

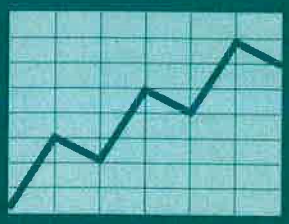

Federal First-Line Supervisors: How Good Are They?

A Report to the President and the Congress of the United States by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

THE CHAIRMAN

U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD
1120 Vermont Avenue, N W.
Washington, D C 20419

March 1992

Sirs:

In accordance with the requirements of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, it is my honor to submit this Merit Systems Protection Board report titled "Federal First-Line Supervisors: How Good Are They?"

First-line supervisors play a critical role in the success of all organizations. However, the question of what constitutes a *good* first-line supervisor is a matter of debate. This report discusses the standards used to measure the quality of first-line supervisors, and how Federal supervisors currently measure up to those standards.

Although we found that first-line supervisors are seen by themselves and others as being of fairly high quality, there are nonetheless areas of concern. The implications of these findings for those responsible for public personnel policy are discussed and recommendations are offered for ensuring that Federal agencies maintain the highest quality level possible for this key group of employees.

I believe you will find this report useful as you consider issues regarding the efficient and effective management of the Federal civilian work force.

Respectfully,

Daniel R. Levinson

Daniel R. Levinson

The President
President of the Senate
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Washington, DC

A Special Study

FEDERAL FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS: HOW GOOD ARE THEY?

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by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has become a generally accepted fact that well-qualified first-line supervisors are a vital ingredient in the chemistry of successful organizations. This is certainly the case in Federal departments and agencies, which, together, employ over 185,000 individuals as supervisors. There is less agreement, however, on what constitutes a good first-line supervisor. By what standards does one measure supervisory quality and how do Federal supervisors compare against that criteria? This study by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board provides some answers to these increasingly important questions.

In the United States, much attention is being given to the question of quality. In particular, concerns about the ability of our Nation to maintain and improve our competitive edge in a world market very much involve questions about workforce quality. Such questions are not restricted to the private sector but are equally relevant in the Federal Government.

The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB or Board) has a statutory responsibility to provide the President and Congress with periodic reports on the "health" of the Federal Civil Service and other merit systems. This report discusses the results of an MSPB study on the quality of Federal first-line supervisors. It complements an earlier 1989 MSPB study which looked at how first-line supervisors are selected. It is based on the premise that a capable civil service system should provide the Federal Government with a cadre of well-qualified and effective supervisors. Further, these supervisors should play a key role in assuring that the Federal workforce is used efficiently and effectively.

Our findings are based, in large part, on responses to an MSPB survey which asked selected Federal employees to rate the importance of 118 different tasks to supervisory effectiveness and to provide an overall assessment of current supervisory ability levels. Nonsupervisory employees were then asked to rate their immediate supervisors' performance, first-line supervisors were asked to rate their own performance, and second-level supervisors were asked to rate the performance of their subordinate supervisors. Responses were received from 835 nonsupervisory employees, over 2,500 Federal first-line supervisors, and over 2,400 second-level supervisors.

FINDINGS:

- As a group, and perhaps contrary to popular belief, Federal first-line supervisors see themselves and are seen by others in the workplace as being of fairly high quality overall. When rated on a five-point scale (with 5 being "Very Effective"), the supervisors received an average of 4.3 on overall quality and effectiveness. However, not all supervisors are of equal quality, nor do they perform equally well on all of the tasks deemed important to the supervisory role.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- People at different levels of the organization see first-line supervisory quality differently. First-line supervisors rated their own performance higher than second-level supervisors rated it and *much* higher than nonsupervisory employees saw it.

- Of 118 possible supervisory tasks, 14 were rated by at least 85 percent of first-line and second-level supervisors as being important to success to either a "considerable" or "great" extent. These 14 tasks include not only what a supervisor does (such as planning work and establishing priorities) but also how the supervisor does it (such as setting a good example for employees and being consistent and fair in dealing with them).

- Although the ratings of supervisors on the 14 most important tasks were fairly positive, there was some cause for concern. For example, although all first-line supervisors thought they did an acceptable or better job of setting a good example for employees, almost one out of every four nonsupervisory employees (23 percent) disagreed and 8 percent of the second-line supervisors also disagreed.

- When asked to provide an overall rating of the extent to which a supervisor contributed to the accomplishment of the organization's objectives, goals, and mission, 98 percent of the first-line supervisors thought their own contribution was substantial and met or exceeded expectations. By contrast, 25 percent of nonsupervisory employees reported that their supervisors' contributions were either rarely positive or not substantial, and 11 percent of the second-level supervisors agreed.

- The important job requirements for first-line supervisors were judged to be very similar not only for the two specific occupational groups studied—accountants and supply clerks/technicians—but also for the group of supervisors drawn from all occupational areas. Likewise, the quality of the supervisors in the three groups was very similar. This suggests that there are some core supervisory skills that are important to supervisory success regardless of the work being supervised.

These findings have a number of implications. Although it is gratifying to note that the majority of Federal supervisors are perceived to be well-qualified and effective, there is also measurable room for improvement within the supervisory corps. It is also important to know that there are a number of specific supervisory tasks and abilities—separate from technical skill in the work being supervised—that are very important to supervisory effectiveness. Better assessment of the degree to which individuals possess these abilities will be useful both in supervisory selection and in better targeting of training and development efforts. Performance-based surveys, such as the one used in this study, can be a useful part of that assessment process.

It is also useful to note and to measure the differences in perceptions among nonsupervisory employees, first-line, and second-level supervisors with regard to the quality of first-line supervisors. It is not a question of whether one perception is more accurate than the others, but the fact that a well-rounded assessment of a supervisor's quality or effectiveness should include input from all three levels since each provides a potentially unique perspective.

Finally, it is important to remember that supervisory quality cannot be measured in a vacuum. Other factors, such as the organization's personnel policies and systems, organizational structure and culture, and considerations such as the organization's mission, budget and resources, and external pressures (including public opinion and congressional mandates), will all have an impact on the ability of the Federal first-line supervisor to be effective. For example, an important supervisory task is to assess employee performance and provide feedback. Supervisors need to be skilled in that task and an organization's performance management system should support those efforts or, at the least, not hinder them.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. In using any assessment tool to measure the quality of first-line supervisors, Federal agencies should strongly consider a multifaceted approach to that assessment which uses inputs from the first-line supervisor, the employees supervised, and the second-line supervisor.

2. Federal agencies and public personnel policymakers should use the results of task-oriented quality measures to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Federal first-line supervisors, both as a group and as individuals. Those results have several applications:

   —To assure the greatest return on monies invested in supervisory training and development, supervisors should be selected for training not just on the basis of their self-nomination (which is frequently how they are selected) but also on the basis of a task-oriented assessment of their need for the training. And that assessment should be based on input from others besides the supervisors themselves, such as their subordinates.

   —Training and development programs should be tailored to meet the individual performance needs of those receiving the training. This tailoring can be accomplished through the use of a task-oriented assessment of their needs. The training programs should include both curriculum development for formal training and individual development plans.

   —Federal supervisory selection systems should be reexamined, if needed, to assure that they are capable of identifying those individuals most highly qualified when assessed against core supervisory tasks and abilities of the type discussed in this report. A system that relies primarily on an assessment of technical capability in the work to be supervised will, in most cases, be inadequate.

   —When an organization-wide or even a Governmentwide assessment of supervisory quality has identified a general deficiency, consideration should be given to the possibility that the deficiency is related more to a problem outside the control of the individual supervisor. For example, the current Governmentwide examination of the Federal performance management system is properly exploring the possibility that the system is hindering the ability of supervisors to evaluate, provide feedback to, and motivate their employees.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A GOOD SUPERVISOR?

What makes a supervisor a *good* supervisor? And is the quality of our Federal first-line supervisors something that we really need to be concerned about?

Actually, the quality of the entire Federal workforce is something we need to be concerned about. A report on a recent conference on workforce quality assessment noted that "a central goal and purpose of the U.S. civil service system has been the creation of a highly qualified Federal workforce to effectively carry out the purposes of the Government."[1] And as the Civil Service's Chief Executive, President Bush, has noted:

> *This Nation has prospered under its system of self-government, yet we know that this system remains only as just and as effective as the individual men and women who have dedicated themselves to public service.*[2]

But as Federal agencies grapple with budget constraints, personnel cutbacks, and workload challenges, do we currently have the calibre of workers to ensure that the purposes of the Government are being carried out effectively? Although there exists much anecdotal information concerning Federal workforce quality, there is very little comprehensive, empirical information about current quality levels—especially quality levels of particular facets of the workforce. And Federal first-line supervisors comprise a key group for which adequate quality information is sorely needed.

What do first-line supervisors do that's so important? If asked what it is that supervisors actually do, most people would probably respond with an answer that implies one basic task: "they manage people," or "they oversee the work of their subordinates," or "they direct the work of their subordinates." In fact, however, managing or directing others is a complex, multifaceted job: first-line supervisors perform a wide variety of specific tasks—some more frequently than others, and some more important than others. Much research has been done to determine the different types of tasks that first-line supervisors typically perform. The variety of activities which may characterize the first-line supervisor's job include the following:[3]

- Planning and scheduling work, documentation of records and reports;
- Carrying out "human relations" counseling;

[1] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board and U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "A Report on the Conference on Workforce Quality Assessment," Washington, DC, September, 1989, p. 1.

[2] Letter from President George Bush to employees of the Federal Government, Washington, DC, December 1991.

[3] This list was taken from Kenneth Hill, Steven Kerr, and Laurie Broedling, "The First-line Supervisor: Literature Review," a report released by Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, San Diego, CA, 1984.

- Coordination and control, organizing subordinates' work;
- Maintaining external relations;
- Managing performance reward contingencies;
- Maintaining quality and efficiency;
- Maintaining safety and cleanliness;
- Maintaining machinery and equipment;
- Selecting employees;
- Training employees;
- Stimulating suggestions, and
- Maintaining union-management relations.

Although first-line supervisors have always played a major role in the successful accomplishment of the Federal Government's many missions, over the next decade they will have an increasingly critical role in the future of the Federal workforce. Their role will become more critical (and probably more difficult) because of the dramatic changes predicted concerning new entrants into the Federal workforce and the increasing technical complexity of the work to be performed over the next decade. For example, the Hudson Institute has predicted that many Federal jobs will be increasing in technical complexity while the skill levels of individuals entering those jobs are declining (compared to present skill levels of entry workers).[4] For the first-line supervisor, such changes are likely to translate into a greater need to provide on-the-job training to subordinates, and more coaching of performance. A much greater level of diversity among Federal workers has also been predicted, and along with that, work environments are likely to change. Additionally, as the current Federal workforce ages, greater demands will be placed on employees trying to juggle family or other personal responsibilities with their work responsibilities, a development that will increase the need for more flexibility in the workplace. First-line supervisors will need to respond to expected changes in the work environment with increased sensitivity to the particular needs of subordinates. Many of the old ways of managing may no longer be relevant.

In order to ensure that they are prepared to meet these challenges, we need to learn more about how good our first-line supervisors currently are. This study attempts to do just that.

HOW WE DETERMINED THE QUALITY OF FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS

While there may be numerous ways to assess quality levels, this study primarily examines the perceived effectiveness of first-line supervisors on a variety of tasks that supervisors reported are critical to success in the job. In order to determine the tasks most important to the first-line supervisor's job, and how effectively the current first-line supervisors are performing those tasks, we obtained the views of individuals at a number of different organizational levels. That is, we asked people who occupy different places in the organizational hierarchy to rate the importance of the tasks performed by the first-line supervisors and the effectiveness of the first-line supervisors' performance of those tasks.

We obtained the input of people at these different organizational levels by developing a survey which consisted of a wide variety of tasks previously found to be relevant to first-line supervisory jobs in the Federal sector.[5] We administered the survey to three groups of employees: first-line supervisors,

[4] The Hudson Institute, "Civil Service 2000," Washington, DC, 1988.

[5] Through the administration of extensive, empirically based job analyses, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management identified 118 different tasks common to first-line supervisory positions in numerous occupational fields. For a more complete discussion of OPM's studies and development of a model based on this work, see L.R. Flanders and D. Utterback, "The Management Excellence Inventory: A Tool for Management Development," Public Administration Review, May-June 1985, pp. 403-410.

second-level supervisors, and subordinates of the first-line supervisors (nonsupervisory employees). We asked **first-line supervisors** to rate the importance of the tasks they performed and how they viewed the effectiveness of their own performance; we asked **second-level supervisors** how they viewed the importance of the tasks their subordinate first-line supervisors performed, and how they viewed the effectiveness of the first-line supervisors' performance; and we asked **nonsupervisory employees** how they viewed the effectiveness of the performance of their immediate supervisors.

In addition to rating the effectiveness of the supervisors' performance of the tasks, we also asked survey respondents to rate the first-line supervisors in more general performance areas, which we refer to as "abilities" in this report. These abilities included aspects of performance such as use of time, creativity, and ability to perform a variety of tasks. We also asked all three groups to make an overall quality/effectiveness rating of the first-line supervisors. A copy of the version of the survey that went to first-line supervisors is reproduced in the appendix.

We selected our survey participants from the Central Personnel Data file (CPDF) maintained by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Surveys went to a sample of full-time, permanent, white-collar first-line supervisors, second-level supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees throughout the executive branch of the Federal Government. Although we were primarily interested in obtaining information concerning the quality of first-line supervisors' performance regardless of occupation, we were also curious as to whether levels of supervisory effectiveness differed with occupational grouping. To explore this issue, we designed the survey sample in such a way that we could make comparisons between two specific occupational groups: supply clerks/technicians (GS-2005), and accountants (GS-510). We were also able to compare these groups with the group of supervisors from all other occupational series.[6] We selected accountants and supply clerks/technicians for comparison purposes not only because they supervise different types of work, but also because supervisors in these areas tend to be found at different grade levels (i.e., supervisors in the supply clerk/technician series typically occupy lower grades than supervisory accountants do).

Surveys were mailed to participants in April 1991. A total of 2,533 surveys were completed by first-line supervisors (a 65 percent return rate of deliverable surveys); 2,434 were completed by second-level supervisors (a 64 percent return rate); and 835 were completed by nonsupervisory employees (a 62 percent return rate).

[6] The second-level supervisors were grouped according to the occupational series of the (subordinate) first-line supervisors they were rating on the survey; the nonsupervisory employees were grouped according to the occupational series of the first-line supervisors they were rating (i.e., their immediate bosses).

RESULTS

> **The quality of Civil Service supervision will continue deteriorating until the major criterion for selecting a supervisor—technical competence in a nonsupervisory position—is changed. We need leaders who know what makes people tick, who want to be managers/supervisors, and who can measure performance in terms other than the ability to create more work for others to process or the ability to meet deadlines.**
>
> A Survey Respondent

A SUPERVISOR'S MOST IMPORTANT TASKS

What tasks are most important in performing the first-line supervisor's job? Our survey focused on 118 tasks describing many different aspects of the supervisor's job. The tasks included in the survey covered both *what* is done by supervisors (e.g., planning and scheduling work, supervising the work of subordinates, interacting with others outside the work group), and also *how* the supervisor accomplishes the work (e.g., solving problems by gathering information through informal inquiry, managing time, setting a good example for employees). Our survey results show that, although all of the 118 tasks on our survey were of some importance to the first-line supervisor's job, there were some tasks that most first-line supervisors and second-level supervisors agreed are *very* important. Table 1 lists 14 tasks which were seen as being important to a considerable or very great extent by 85 percent of the first-line supervisors and second-level supervisors.

The 14 tasks listed in table 1 present a fairly even mix of tasks concerned with *what* the supervisor does versus those concerned with *how* the supervisor works. For example, tasks such as "Use performance elements and standards to assess employee performance and give feedback" and "Keep supervisor informed of problems and work status" are tasks specifically concerned with *what* the first-line supervisor actually does. On the other hand, tasks such as "Demonstrate a positive approach to employees—a 'can do' attitude" and "Be consistent and fair when dealing with employees" are tasks which focus on *how* a supervisor performs his duties.

Based on the tasks shown in table 1, then, it appears that both aspects of performance (the what and the how) are important to a supervisor's success in the job. The importance of both to the first-line supervisor's job corroborates earlier research on supervisors in the public sector conducted by OPM.[7] Additionally, written comments submitted by survey respondents emphasize both of these aspects of performance. For example, *what* supervisors do (or don't do) is the focus of the following comment:

> *[This supervisor] never made the transition from "worker" to "supervisor." She has continued to perform the day-to-day work exactly the same as before. Her perception of the duties of supervision appears to be [limited to] the maintenance of time and labor cards. She is required to do a great deal more, but does not seem to be able (or have the desire) to perform what is necessary.*

[7] Flanders and Utterback, op. cit.

TABLE 1. MOST IMPORTANT TASKS FOR FIRST-LINE SUPERVISOR'S JOB

The following tasks were rated by at least 85% of first-line supervisors and second-level supervisors as being important to the first-line supervisor's job either to a considerable or great extent:

- Establish priorities among work unit activities and projects.
- Schedule work so that available resources are used most efficiently.
- Use performance elements and standards to assess employee performance and give feedback.
- Explain tasks so that employees clearly understand their duties.
- Maintain good working relationships with immediate supervisor and peer supervisors.
- Keep supervisor informed of problems and work status.
- Speak clearly and effectively.
- Listen to others and show understanding of what they are saying.
- Be consistent and fair in dealing with employees.
- Actively promote cooperation and teamwork within work unit.
- Demonstrate a positive approach to employees—a "can do" attitude.
- Show respect and support for employees.
- Set a good example for employees.
- Manage own time efficiently.

But, as is evidenced by the following comment, *how* the supervisor performs tasks can also determine the supervisor's perceived effectiveness:

> *[My supervisor] treats his staff as professionals, which causes them, in turn, to work as professionals. If all supervisors had abilities even close to his, the Federal Government would be an awesome entity.*

In addition to looking at which tasks were most important for first-line supervisors overall, we looked at whether supervisors in the two different occupational groups (i.e., accounting and supply) differed in the importance ratings they gave the 14 most important tasks. In comparing average importance ratings on the tasks, we found great similarity between the two occupational groups, as well as between each of the occupational groups and the group of supervisors from all other occupations.

Thus, these 14 tasks appear to be critical for performing the first-line supervisor's job, regardless of the supervisor's occupational field.

Because there was such extensive agreement among survey respondents concerning the importance of the 14 tasks found in table 1 for performing the first-line supervisor's job, we will focus on those particular tasks as we discuss the quality of supervisors. In addition to performance on the 14 tasks, we will also look at how survey respondents viewed both the overall quality and the abilities of first-line supervisors.

PERFORMANCE RATINGS

Ratings on the Most Important Tasks. How effectively are supervisors performing? As can be seen in table 2, first-line supervisors received fairly high ratings on the 14 tasks most important to the supervisory job. However, there were notable differences in how the first-line supervisors, second-level supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees viewed the first-line supervisors' performance of these tasks. First-line supervisors gave themselves the highest ratings, while nonsupervisory employees gave the lowest ratings to the first-line supervisors.

> **My supervisor is more concerned with blindly following HIS supervisor rather than listening to the people who do the work on a day-to-day basis and tempering his decisions with their ideas and suggestions. Favoritism is practiced and is highly noticeable both to the people being favored and to those who are treated unfairly.**
> A Survey Respondent

More importantly, however, it appears that supervisors do not perform the various tasks equally well. For example, as can be seen in table 2, supervisors received overall higher marks on tasks such as "Keep supervisor informed of problems and work status" and "Maintain good working relationships with immediate supervisor and peer supervisors" than they did on tasks such as "Manage own time efficiently" and "Use performance elements and standards to assess employee performance and give feedback". Although the ratings on all 14 tasks were fairly positive, some of the ratings that nonsupervisory employees made concerning their supervisors' performance were disturbing. For example, on two of the tasks, "Use performance elements and standards to assess employee performance and give feedback" and "Be consistent and fair in dealing with employees," at least *one-quarter* of the nonsupervisory employees said their supervisors were performing at a barely acceptable level or did not believe the supervisors could perform the tasks at all.

The nonsupervisory employees rated their supervisors almost as negatively on at least six other of the most important tasks; i.e., "Listen to others and show an understanding of what they are saying," "Set a good example for employees," "Schedule work so that available resources are used most efficiently," "Explain tasks so that employees clearly understand their duties," "Actively promote cooperation and teamwork within work unit," and "Show respect and support for employees."

> **[My supervisor] has been both example and mentor. She grants much attention to my personal and career development and allows me to experience and experiment on my own, but never lets me feel that she is working against me. I think that alone can improve the outlook and performance of any employee.**
> A Survey Respondent

TABLE 2. PERFORMANCE RATINGS ON MOST IMPORTANT TASKS FOR FIRST-LINE SUPERVISOR'S JOB

This table shows how the three different groups of survey respondents (first-line supervisors, second-level supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees) rated first-line supervisors on each task.

Establish priorities among work unit activities and projects.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	86%	72%	48%
Acceptable	14%	25%	33%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	1%	3%	19%

Schedule work so that available resources are used most efficiently.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	84%	69%	46%
Acceptable	16%	27%	31%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	1%	4%	23%

Use performance elements and standards to assess employee performance and give feedback.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/ Exceptionally well	77%	67%	45%
Acceptable	21%	28%	30%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	1%	5%	25%

Explain tasks so that employees clearly understand their duties.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	83%	65%	44%
Acceptable	16%	29%	34%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	1%	7%	22%

Maintain good working relationships with immediate supervisor and peer supervisors.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	86%	72%	56%
Acceptable	13%	23%	31%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	2%	6%	12%

Keep supervisor informed of problems and work status.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	87%	72%	55%
Acceptable	12%	22%	34%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	1%	7%	11%

Speak clearly and effectively.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	80%	69%	53%
Acceptable	20%	26%	35%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	1%	5%	11%

Listen to others and show understanding of what they are saying.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	86%	64%	50%
Acceptable	14%	28%	27%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	1%	8%	23%

Be consistent and fair in dealing with employees.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	89%	69%	46%
Acceptable	11%	27%	27%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	0%	5%	27%

Actively promote cooperation and teamwork within work unit.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	86%	65%	48%
Acceptable	13%	28%	32%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	1%	7%	21%

Demonstrate a positive approach to employees—a "can do" attitude.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	85%	66%	50%
Acceptable	14%	26%	32%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	1%	8%	17%

Show respect and support for employees.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	90%	72%	52%
Acceptable	10%	25%	26%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	0%	4%	22%

Set a good example for employees.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	89%	67%	49%
Acceptable	11%	26%	28%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	0%	8%	23%

Manage own time efficiently.

Rating	First-line	Second-level	Nonsupervisor
Above average/Exceptionally well	69%	62%	48%
Acceptable	27%	30%	34%
Cannot do/Barely acceptable	4%	8%	19%

On a more positive note, however, about half of the nonsupervisory employees rated their supervisors as performing above average or better on the 14 tasks. This finding indicates that there are many supervisors who are doing well on the things that count—even though there may be a sizable number performing very poorly on those same tasks. For example, even though 23 percent of the nonsupervisory employees did not believe that their supervisors listen to others and show understanding of what they are saying, 50 percent of the nonsupervisory employees believed their supervisors perform that task at an above average or exceptional level. And some of the written comments also showed that some supervisors were doing particularly well in this area. For example:

> *My supervisor is very caring and goes out of his way to understand staff working conditions. He talks to * * * employees on a personal basis and makes you feel important at all times.*

Likewise, even though responses to our survey indicate that some supervisors do a poor job of assessing performance and providing feedback, there are many supervisors who are fairly effective in this area. An example would be the supervisor referred to in the following statement:

> *[My supervisor] praises the employee when he has done a good job and gives suggestions when the job is not so good. I think that this is very important because it * * * makes the employee go out of his way the next time and give an extra effort.*

Overall, the majority of first-line supervisors and second-level supervisors and about half of the nonsupervisory employees viewed first-line supervisors' performance of the 14 most important tasks in a very positive light. Nonetheless, the fact that as many as a quarter of the nonsupervisory employees see performance so negatively on some of the tasks should sound an alarm to anyone concerned about the quality of the supervisory workforce.

The findings for the nonsupervisory employees' group corroborate findings from a previous Merit Systems Protection Board survey (the 1989 Merit Principles Survey) which examined employee attitudes toward a number of personnel management issues.[8] In that survey employees were asked to rate their supervisors on various aspects of performance. Those aspects of performance were similar to some of the 14 most important tasks in the survey reported on here. Although a different rating scale was used in the Merit Principles Survey (precluding a direct comparison of results from the two surveys), it is nonetheless interesting to look at the findings from that survey—especially the negative responses to the questions about supervisors' performance. As can be seen in table 3, quite a sizable percentage of nonsupervisory employees responding to the Merit Principles Survey were negative about their supervisors' performance. Although they were somewhat more positive about fair treatment by their supervisors than our present survey respondents, several of the questions on the Merit Principles Survey reflected even less satisfaction with the supervisors' performance than the present survey. The respondents were particularly dissatisfied with their supervisors' leadership skills and efforts to organize the work group effectively. And if perceived accuracy of their performance ratings (which are typically made by their immediate supervisors) is any indication of their assessment of the supervisors' performance management skills, they were as critical of their supervisors as our present survey respondents in the performance management area. Thus, concerns about first-line supervisors' performance in certain areas are not new.

[8] This survey is discussed in "Working for America: A Federal Employee Survey," U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, Washington, DC, June 1990.

TABLE 3. FINDINGS FROM 1989 MERIT PRINCIPLES SURVEY

The findings in this table are based on answers provided by nonsupervisory employees responding to the survey.

1. There is effective two-way communication between my immediate supervisor and me.

66%	agree or strongly agree
12%	neither agree nor disagree
22%	disagree or strongly disagree

2. My immediate supervisor treats me fairly.

72%	agree or strongly agree
14%	neither agree nor disagree
15%	disagree or strongly disagree

3. My immediate supervisor has good technical skills.

67%	agree or strongly agree
14%	neither agree nor disagree
19%	disagree or strongly disagree

4. My immediate supervisor has good leadership skills.

50%	agree or strongly agree
18%	neither agree nor disagree
32%	disagree or strongly disagree

5. My immediate supervisor encourages me to offer ideas and suggestions to improve productivity and/or quality of work.

59%	agree or strongly agree
16%	neither agree nor disagree
25%	disagree or strongly disagree

6. My immediate supervisor has organized our work group effectively to get the work done.

46%	agree or strongly agree
22%	neither agree nor disagree
32%	disagree or strongly disagree

7. My immediate supervisor encourages my participation in making decisions affecting my work.

60%	agree or strongly agree
16%	neither agree nor disagree
24%	disagree or strongly disagree

8. I have trust and confidence in my immediate supervisor.

57%	agree or strongly agree
19%	neither agree nor disagree
25%	disagree or strongly disagree

9. My most recent performance rating presented an accurate picture of my actual job performance.

64%	agree or strongly agree
7%	neither agree nor disagree
29%	disagree or strongly disagree

Is it the case that supervisors in certain occupations perform the 14 most important tasks better than supervisors in other occupations? To explore this issue, we compared average ratings on the 14 tasks for our two specific occupational groups (accountants and supply clerk/technicians) and our group of supervisors from all other occupations. The average ratings for each of the three occupational groups on the 14 tasks were also broken down by type of rater (i.e., first-line supervisors rating themselves, second-level supervisors rating the first-line supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees rating their supervisors).

As can be seen in table 4, there were no real occupational group differences in the three rater groups' average ratings of first-line supervisors. First-line supervisors rated themselves about the same regardless of whether they were accountants, or supply clerks/technicians, or any other occupation. Second-level supervisors rated the first-line supervisors about the same regardless of the first-line supervisor's occupation, as did nonsupervisory employees. However, there were differences among the rater groups, with first-line supervisors rating themselves the highest, second-level supervisors rating them next highest, and nonsupervisory employees rating them the lowest. Thus, it doesn't appear that the quality of supervisors varies by occupation, but, as has been previously noted, individuals at different organizational levels do have differing views of supervisory performance.

Overall Quality Ratings. When asked to rate the first-line supervisors' overall quality/effectiveness, respondents generally gave fairly high marks. First-line supervisors received an average overall quality/effectiveness rating of 4.3 on a five-point rating scale (with 5 being "Very Effective"). However, there were some differences in the quality ratings because raters of different organizational levels don't view supervisors' performance in the same way. As can be seen in figure 1, first-line supervisors rated themselves more favorably than second-level supervisors rated them, and *much* more favorably than nonsupervisory employees rated their first-line supervisors. But even with these differences among the three groups of raters, the ratings suggest that, in general, first-line supervisors are seen as being of fairly high quality. Even of the raters who viewed them the least favorably (i.e., the nonsupervisory employees), the majority (64 percent) viewed the first-line supervisors as being effective overall.

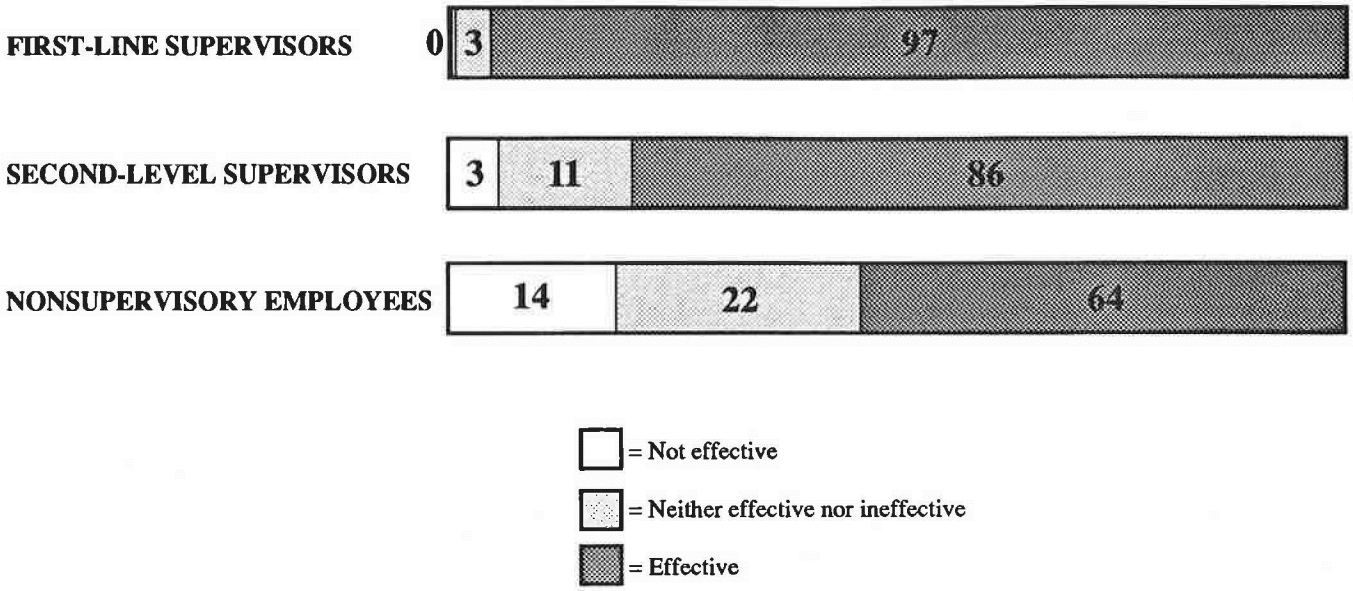
TABLE 4. FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS' AVERAGE PERFORMANCE RATINGS ON THE 14 MOST IMPORTANT TASKS BY OCCUPATION AND RATER

	OCCUPATIONAL GROUP		
RATER	ACCOUNTANT	SUPPLY	OTHERS
First-line supervisors	4.2	4.4	4.3
Second-level supervisors	3.9	3.9	4.0
Nonsupervisory employees	3.5	3.3	3.6

Ratings were made on a 5-point performance level scale ranging from "cannot do" to "[does] exceptionally well"

FIGURE 1. OVERALL QUALITY/EFFECTIVENESS RATINGS OF FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS BY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL (Rating in Percent)

"How would you rate the Quality/Effectiveness of (the First-Line Supervisor)?"



Thus, supervisors were rated differently according to who did the rating. But were supervisors also rated differently according to who was being rated? Specifically, did different groups of first-line supervisors receive noticeably different ratings on their overall quality/effectiveness? To examine this issue, we looked at the overall quality ratings given to first-line supervisors grouped by a number of demographic categories, such as (pay) grade level, sex, and occupational group of the supervisor, and how long the person being rated had been a supervisor.

As can be seen in table 5, there were no appreciable differences among the various groups for any of the demographic categories we examined. Thus, the overall quality/effectiveness rating of the first-line supervisor does not appear to be related to the particular demographic categories to which the supervisor belongs. So, differences among supervisors—such as whether a supervisor is male rather than female, or has had 10 years of experience as a supervisor rather than 2 years of experience—are not what distinguishes an effective supervisor from an ineffective one. Instead, it is much more likely that overall effectiveness is determined by the sum of performance on all those varied, specific tasks that the supervisor performs every day. Thus, efforts to select or to develop effective first-line supervisors should focus on the assessment and improvement of the performance of these tasks.

TABLE 5. SIMILARITY OF SUPERVISORS' OVERALL QUALITY RATINGS ACROSS VARIOUS DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES

Respondents rated supervisor's overall quality/effectiveness on the following scale:

Very Ineffective		Neither Effective Nor Ineffective		Very Effective
1	2	3	4	5

SEX OF THE FIRST-LINE SUPERVISOR

Female		Male	
3%	Not effective	4%	Not effective
8%	Neither effective nor ineffective	9%	Neither effective nor ineffective
89%	Effective	87%	Effective

PAY GRADE OF THE FIRST-LINE SUPERVISOR

Grade 5-7		Grade 8-12	
3%	Not effective	4%	Not effective
9%	Neither effective nor ineffective	9%	Neither effective nor ineffective
88%	Effective	87%	Effective

Grade 13-15

3%	Not effective
7%	Neither effective nor ineffective
89%	Effective

NUMBER OF YEARS IN A SUPERVISORY POSITION

Less than 1 year		1-2 Years	
2%	Not effective	3%	Not effective
9%	Neither effective nor ineffective	9%	Neither effective nor ineffective
90%	Effective	89%	Effective

3-5 Years		6-10 Years	
2%	Not effective	2%	Not effective
8%	Neither effective nor ineffective	7%	Neither effective nor ineffective
90%	Effective	92%	Effective

More than 10 years

1%	Not effective
4%	Neither effective nor ineffective
95%	Effective

OCCUPATIONAL GROUP OF THE FIRST-LINE SUPERVISOR

Accounting		Supply	
3%	Not effective	4%	Not effective
9%	Neither effective nor ineffective	10%	Neither effective nor ineffective
88%	Effective	86%	Effective

Other

4%	Not effective
8%	Neither effective nor ineffective
88%	Effective

Note: The ratings made by all groups of raters (i.e., first-line supervisors, second-level supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees) have been combined in this table.

> ***My supervisor is always more than willing to get his hands dirty. He will also protect and back all of his employees as long as his employees are right.***
> *A Survey Respondent*

Ability ratings. Survey participants also rated first-line supervisors on a number of questions concerning various abilities. When ratings by all respondents (first-line supervisors, second-level supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees) were combined, results showed that:

- **80 percent** were rated as having almost all or all of the knowledges and skills necessary to perform almost all or all tasks;

- **78 percent** were rated as having usually superior or always the highest quality work;

- **68 percent** were rated as making contributions to the organization's objectives, goals, and mission which frequently or typically exceeded expectations, with the supervisor serving as a leading example for others;

- **67 percent** were rated as being able to perform many different or an unusually large variety of different assignments;

- **66 percent** were rated as performing at a fast or unusually fast pace; and

- **57 percent** were rated as producing work that shows much or exceptional creativity, making use of new and better approaches.

However, when the ratings made by respondents in the three groups (first-line supervisors, second-level supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees) were separated, it became clear that raters differed in the degree to which they thought first-line supervisors demonstrated these abilities. As with our previously reported findings on task ratings and overall quality/effectiveness ratings, first-line supervisors rated themselves higher on these abilities than both the second-level supervisors and the nonsupervisory employees rated them. However, here the self-ratings were not just higher than the nonsupervisory ratings, but much higher.

As can be seen in figures 2 through 7, even though the rater groups differed in how effective they believed the first-line supervisors' performance to be, each group saw supervisors' demonstration of individual abilities relative to one another in much the same way. That is, they all tended to give the highest ratings on the abilities concerned with the quality of the first-line supervisors' work and the knowledges and skills required to perform a wide range of tasks. Similarly, all three rater groups were much less likely to believe that the supervisors could propose, produce, or apply new approaches to the job (i.e., they didn't see first-line supervisors as particularly creative or innovative). The latter finding is of some concern because, if present trends continue and managers find themselves having to do more and more with less, finding new ways of doing things and applying new approaches to the job may become increasingly important. Written comments provided by respondents offered some mitigating insight on this issue, however. As one first-line supervisor noted:

> *A supervisor is limited in the extent to which he or she can utilize creative or innovative ideas. A very qualified supervisor can only be effective to the extent that the bureaucracy allows.*

Thus, as is perhaps true for other areas of performance, effectiveness in the creativity/innovation area may be limited by factors beyond the direct control of the first-line supervisor.

FIGURE 2. RATINGS ON HOW EFFICIENTLY FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS USE THEIR TIME, GROUPED BY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL OF THE RATER (Rating in Percent)

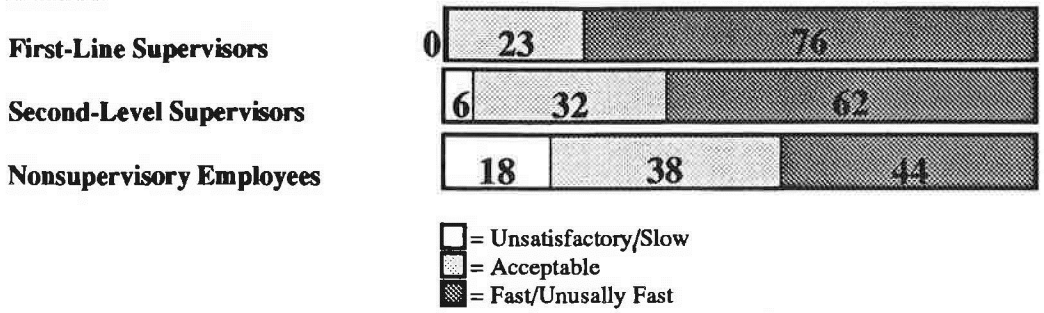


FIGURE 3. RATINGS ON QUALITY OF FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS' WORK, GROUPED BY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL OF THE RATER (Rating in Percent)

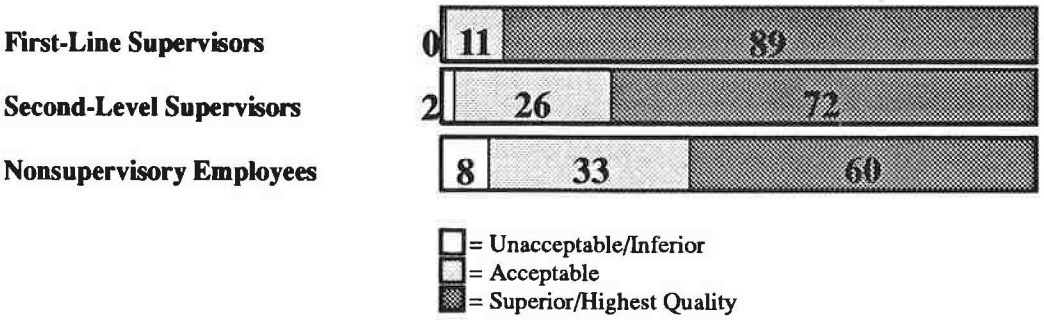
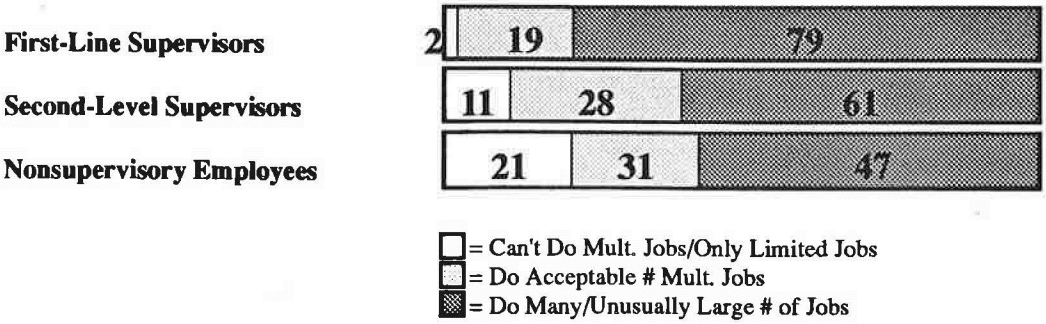


FIGURE 4. RATINGS ON FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS' ABILITY TO HANDLE MULTIPLE JOBS, GROUPED BY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL OF THE RATER (Rating in Percent)



Note: In figures 2-7, all ratings are expressed in Percentages. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

FIGURE 5. RATINGS ON FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS' ABILITY TO PROPOSE, PRODUCE, OR APPLY NEW APPROACHES, GROUPED BY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL OF THE RATER (Rating in Percent)

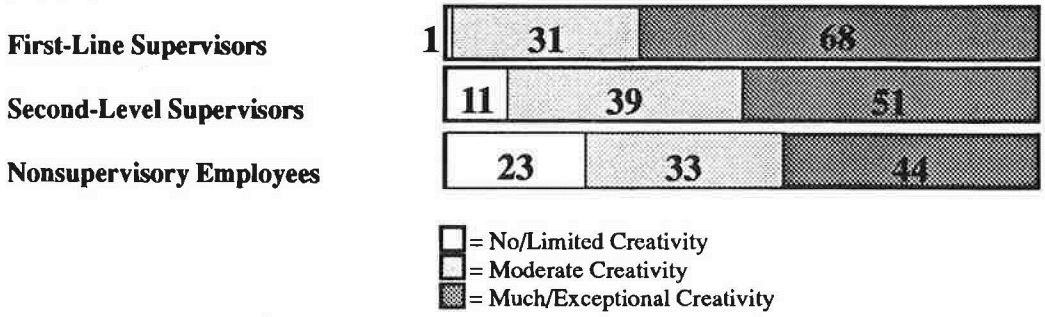


FIGURE 6. RATINGS ON FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS' ABILITY TO PERFORM JOB TASKS, GROUPED BY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL OF THE RATER (Rating in Percent)

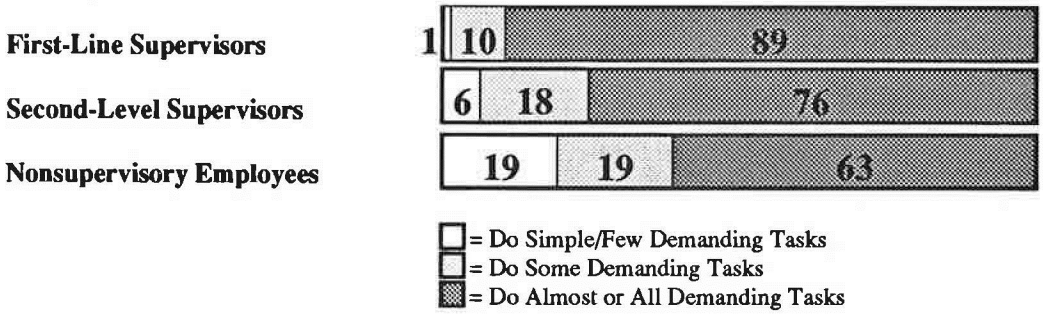
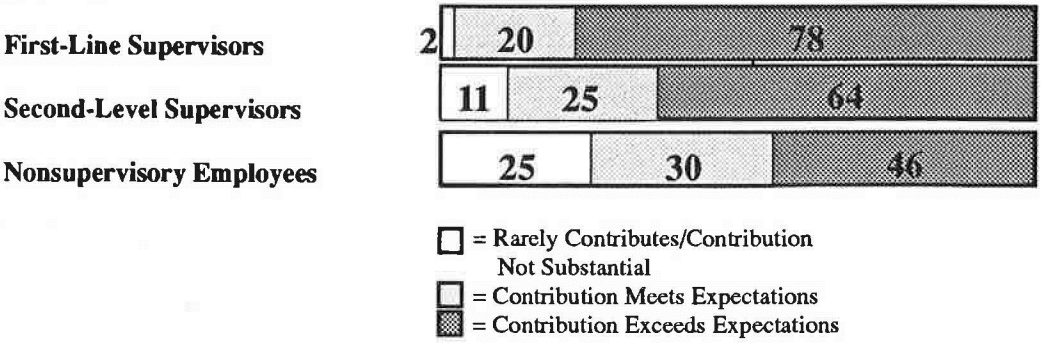


FIGURE 7. RATINGS ON FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS' CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANIZATIONS' MISSION, GROUPED BY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL OF THE RATER (Rating in Percent)



Note: In figures 2-7, all ratings are expressed in Percentages. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

The nonsupervisory employees' ratings on the first-line supervisors' contribution to the accomplishment of the organizations' objectives, goals, and mission are also of concern. Twenty-five percent of the nonsupervisory employees said that their supervisors' contributions to the organizations' objectives and goals were either rarely positive or not substantial. This is very disturbing, given the critical role that supervisors will need to play in light of projected changes in the workplace. If employees aren't particularly confident that their supervisors are "making a difference" now, how will they see their performance if the supervisory job becomes more challenging?

Overall, in spite of the differences found among raters, the majority of all respondents considered that the first-line supervisors' performance relative to the listed abilities was at least acceptable or better. But how important is the rating for each of these abilities in the measurement of overall quality/effectiveness? Are some abilities ratings more important than others in assessing quality? Although we did not ask respondents to rate the importance of the abilities, we can look at the relationship of the ratings that respondents made on each of the abilities and the ratings they made on overall quality/effectiveness. These comparisons indicate that although each of the abilities ratings was highly related to the overall quality/effectiveness rating, the rating for one ability, the supervisor's perceived contribution to organizational mission, appears to have the strongest relationship to the overall quality rating. This holds true regardless of who was rating the supervisor (i.e., it is true for all three organizational level groups). (Thus, the fact that a quarter of the nonsupervisory employees rated their supervisors rather negatively on "contribution to mission" may be more significant than first thought—a sizable number of them believed that their supervisors were not performing well in an area that had a major role in how all three respondent groups viewed overall quality.) On the other hand, the rating for the ability concerned with creativity and innovation did not have as strong a relationship to the overall quality rating as the other abilities ratings had. Therefore, ratings for the six abilities we looked at do not contribute equally to the overall assessment of quality of first-line supervisors.

Overall, our findings regarding first-line supervisors' performance of the most important tasks, the overall quality/effectiveness ratings, and ratings on abilities provide some encouraging information about the quality of first-line supervisors. The first-line supervisors and the second-level supervisors appeared to be generally satisfied with the first-line supervisors' performance. Unfortunately, those views were not entirely shared by nonsupervisory employees. Additionally, as previously noted, some of our findings point to major areas of concern. What are the implications of these and the other findings for broad-scale measurement of quality, the future of our supervisory workforce, and efforts to achieve excellence in the Federal Government? This topic will now be addressed.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Based on the findings in this report, we can conclude that most supervisors are generally performing well—but certain areas need watching. Also, it is very clear that people at different organizational levels view the performance of supervisors very differently. Perhaps it is not surprising to find that the first-line supervisors we surveyed saw their own performance more positively than either second-level supervisors or nonsupervisory employees saw it. But what was surprising was the magnitude of the differences in ratings. Although second-level supervisors' ratings of tasks, abilities, and overall quality/effectiveness were more in line with the first-line supervisors' ratings, the nonsupervisory employees' ratings were consistently much lower than the first-line or second-level supervisors' ratings of the first-line supervisor. And the nonsupervisory employees did not always agree with the first-line supervisors or second-level supervisors concerning supervisors' level of performance on the 14 most important tasks, relative to one another. For example, the first-line supervisors and second-level supervisors saw being fair and consistent in dealing with employees as one of the tasks that first-line supervisors performed the best, whereas nonsupervisory employees saw it as one of the worst.

Why did we find such discrepancies among the raters' perceptions, and what implications do these differences have for the measurement of quality? When relying on performance ratings as measures of quality, regardless of how closely the ratings are tied to specific behaviors observed on the job, it is important to realize that these ratings are still subjective—quality is in the eye of the beholder. The prior experiences and preconceptions that the rater brings to the situation will affect the ratings he or she makes, to some extent. But the ratings will also differ across different organizational levels because the raters have different opportunities to observe the supervisors' performance. The different opportunities to observe, coupled with the context within which the rater "sees" performance, make for very different views of quality.

And which view of performance is most accurate? Do nonsupervisory employees rate first-line supervisors more accurately than second-level supervisors, since they are likely to have greater opportunities to observe the first-line supervisor on a daily basis, in all kinds of situations? Or do the second-level supervisors make the most accurate ratings because they have "been there" and have a better understanding of the requirements and expectations of the job than nonsupervisory employees? Or is the first-line supervisor in the best position to rate, since no one knows better than oneself what one's job is all about? In truth, no one perspective can present the whole picture. Instead, a reliable measure of quality depends on a multifaceted view of performance. In other words, all three groups have unique contributions to make to the assessment of quality.

In addition to providing a more comprehensive picture of quality, differences in the perceptions of raters at different organizational levels can provide useful information for meeting other organizational needs. For example, training and development efforts, or even initiatives to enhance communication, might focus on specific task areas for which perceptions about performance effectiveness differed. Efforts to increase awareness of others' roles and expectations may enable all employees (at all organizational levels) to perform their jobs better—or, at the very least, alleviate the dissatisfaction and frustration that often result from misunderstanding others' roles in the organization.

With regard to training, differences in perceptions about performance also highlight another important issue—selection for training and development efforts. Many Federal organizations use self-nomination as a basis for selection for much of the training that is done. That is, training is often initiated by an employee (including the first-line supervisor) going to his or her supervisor and requesting a particular training course or program because the training is something that interests the employee, or the employee has decided he or she would like development in a certain area. Unfortunately, as was emphasized , in the findings from our survey, there are sometimes big differences between how one views one's own performance and how others view it. Thus, instead of letting first-line supervisors decide solely for themselves the areas in which they need training or development, perhaps input by other individuals is warranted, to make the most effective use of training resources.

The varied perceptions about supervisors' performance may provide quality measures that assist organizations with other evaluation efforts. Certain systems or processes within the organization may need performance-based, multiple-view assessments such as those discussed in this report. An example of a system which lends itself well to quality measures such as the ones used in this study is a performance management system. Over the years, the Federal Government has invested massive resources trying to figure out how to improve its performance management systems. After struggling with numerous attempts to link pay with performance, the Government implemented entirely new performance management systems with passage of the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act. These new systems required a new way of doing business for Federal employees—resulting in enormous expenditures for training employees and managers in the workings of the new systems, and for developing specific policies, procedures, and forms according to the requirements of the new systems, among other things. Since 1978, the systems have been scrutinized continuously through elaborate research efforts, both within individual agencies and departments, as well as across the entire Federal Government (for example, the National Research Council recently published results of their exhaustive evaluation of the merit pay system).[9]

But evaluations of the new performance management systems indicate that they are still not fulfilling the expectations their designers envisioned for them. In fact, it is very likely that we will see more changes in Federal performance management systems.

Furthermore, in implementing future changes to Federal performance management systems, we may discover that while supervisors alone are not responsible for the success or failure of such systems, they can have a significant impact on the systems' eventual success or failure. And regardless of the nature of any future changes, collecting information to determine how successfully supervisors perform tasks which underlie the systems' operation (as we did on our survey) may prove useful for evaluating the effectiveness of the changes. For example, if we continue to have performance management systems which are based on the notion that supervisors should discuss their expectations for subordinates' performance with their subordinates, and provide subordinates with frank and frequent feedback about their performance, then supervisors must be capable of carrying out these tasks. Unfortunately, information collected in this study suggests that not all supervisors are able—or willing—to perform them.

[9] These results are detailed in "Pay For Performance—Evaluating Performance Appraisal and Merit Pay," a report by the Committee on Performance Appraisal for Merit Pay of the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council, Washington DC, National Academy Press, 1991.

In trying to develop a measure of quality for first-line supervisors, we were also interested in seeing if the measure was broadly applicable to multiple occupations. That is, do supervisors in different occupations perform such different tasks that it's impossible to develop a measure that can be used on a broad scale? And even if we could develop a measure that "fits" all supervisors, would it contain information about the tasks or other aspects of performance that really make a difference (in terms of overall quality or effectiveness)? Our results indicate that it is possible to develop a survey that applies to diverse occupational groups, as evidenced by the fact that the relative importance of the tasks and the performance ratings on these tasks were very similar across the occupational groups we studied. And judging from the differences in the importance ratings given to the various tasks on the survey, it does appear that the measure used for quality assessment captured critical aspects of effectiveness in these supervisory positions. Thus, the findings from this study provide evidence that it is possible to develop useful measures of quality capable of spanning occupational areas. This finding is particularly important for policymakers in organizations which employ a very diverse workforce, because it suggests that, even in those situations, it may be feasible to assess the quality of the workforce.

Also, because there were differences in the ratings supervisors received on the individual tasks that comprised our measure of quality, the use of such a quality measure can have additional benefits. That is, the information on differing performance effectiveness levels for various tasks could be used to tailor training and development programs to focus them on the specific task areas in which particular supervisors are having problems. This should prove to be a more cost effective approach than the more generic approach agencies currently take to supervisory training (i.e., all supervisors take the same basic training courses, regardless of their individual needs). And, in light of shrinking budgets, unless agencies can make a sound argument that they are getting a substantial return (in terms of improved performance and increased productivity) on their training expenditures, they may find that training dollars will no longer be forthcoming.

Fortunately, one of the advantages of using quality measures (such as the survey reported on here) to assess training needs and to tailor training to those needs, is that they can also be used to evaluate the trainees' performance *after* training has taken place. This information can provide agencies with the kind of data they'll need to justify continued training expenditures.

Measures which are based on ratings of performance of a variety of tasks can provide useful information about quality levels of groups of employees, such as the first-line supervisors that we studied. But even though we found that these measures can be applied to a diverse population of employees such as first-line supervisors, do the ratings on tasks and abilities really tell the whole story about supervisors' effectiveness? That is, are there other factors operating which can influence how well supervisors perform (and, in turn, are rated)? Generally, as we have said, our results indicated that first-line supervisors were performing well on most of the tasks we focused on (at least in the eyes of the first-line supervisors, second-level supervisors, and some of the nonsupervisory employees we surveyed). Yet there were many respondents who felt that first-line supervisors needed improvement.

> **The problem isn't finding bright, capable, efficient, and willing employees. The problem is keeping them. The problem is satisfaction with their work and adequate compensation for their performance. The problem is the morale and attitude that develops with being overburdened. These are NOT things that an immediate supervisor can cure. Upper management decides the staff levels, OPM and Personnel decide the grade. Being a compassionate and caring supervisor who tries to meet employees' personal needs for working conditions * * * will NOT go very far * * *.**
>
> A Survey Respondent

Even though the supervisors we studied did well on many of the tasks (and abilities) we measured, concerns remain about how well first-line supervisors are performing. Therefore, we may need to consider whether factors outside the supervisors' control are contributing to the performance deficiencies found with our measure. It may be that the environment in which first-line supervisors operate (and the tools we give them to do their jobs) is actually *hindering* their performance. As one author has suggested,[10] a number of factors can influence how effectively supervisors perform, only one of which involves characteristics of the supervisors themselves. As that author sees it, these factors include:

Supervisor's attitude, ability, skills, and knowledge. These are the attributes or factors focused on in this report.

Immediate work environment surrounding the supervisor. This refers to the interpersonal relationships the supervisor has with subordinates, peers, and superiors, as well as the tools to perform the job, such as his or her own performance standards, authority to make decisions, and feedback from others.

Organizational setting, culture, climate, and policies. This refers to the written laws, regulations, and policies that govern agency operations, as well as unwritten policies and practices, such as the extent to which top management is committed to various objectives throughout the organization.

External environment. This refers to controlling influences outside the organization which affect the supervisor's ability to make decisions and take action, such as public opinion, congressional activities, and union agreements.

It is fairly easy to see how these factors, as they exist in Federal organizations, could have an impact on a supervisor's effectiveness. For example, we give supervisors some tools to manage with, such as complex, rule-bound performance management systems, but offer them very little flexibility to adapt the tools to meet the particular needs of the work groups they supervise. Then we add additional burdens. With performance management systems, for example, in addition to the "official" rules and regulations that cover these systems which make them difficult to use, there are often unwritten organizational policies with which the supervisors are forced to comply. As one supervisor noted:

> *In my years as a first-line supervisor, the hardest tasks I have had to perform are annual performance appraisals. The organization I am in requires the use of*

[10] Jack J. Phillips, "Improving Supervisors' Effectiveness," Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 1985.

*quotas * * *. The workload, the stress, the people can all be handled and managed appropriately to ensure mission accomplishment. However, my office is one of the best in the organization and when I am forced to comply with an unrealistic quota system, I get angry. How can I build credibility and trust when I can't appraise people for what they've earned?*

As another example of how organizational and environmental factors can influence supervisors' performance, many Federal organizations do not delegate much authority to first-line supervisors to make decisions and take actions. This leaves supervisors out in the trenches with very little authority to do the things that they deem necessary for the effective and efficient operation of the work unit. Concomitant with a lack of authority, some first-line supervisors also feel that their supervisors are watching over them very closely, and making decisions that the first-line supervisors themselves should be making. The frustration felt as a result of this situation was seen in many of the written comments provided by our survey respondents, such as the two that follow:

We want to do a good job, but do not have the discretion or power necessary.

Many of the first-line supervisors are almost ignored as part of the organization. Supervised staff is well aware of the situation and go directly to our supervisors for advice that should be coming from the first-line supervisor. Our supervisors micro-manage by giving assignments to members of our staff.

Thus, in fairness to the first-line supervisors, perhaps comprehensive quality measures should attempt to gauge these other factors that influence performance effectiveness, as well as assess the competencies of the individual performers. Recognizing that these other factors can limit the extent to which our first-line supervisors can perform effectively, we should also work to change the environments in which the supervisors operate, ensuring that they provide the opportunities supervisors need to perform their best.

No matter how qualified, prepared, willing, knowledgeable and capable, you do not contribute much in a micro-managed environment.
A Survey Respondent

RECOMMENDATIONS

Questions concerning the quality of the Nation's workforce are of long standing. "Conventional wisdom" suggests that the quality of our Federal workforce is lacking. With this study, we have attempted to provide a look at the quality of one group of Federal employees—first-line supervisors. Our results suggest that, overall, conventional wisdom may be wrong; the group of Federal employees we studied generally appeared to be of fairly high quality, at least from a performance-based perspective. There were some areas in which they appeared to be performing better than others, however. We also found no practical differences among the supervisors in the occupational groups we studied. Thus, it is possible to develop quality measures that can be used to evaluate quality even in workforce populations characterized by much diversity among individuals.

Based on these findings, we offer a number of recommendations to Federal policymakers concerning the quality of first-line supervisors:

1. **Policymakers in *all* Federal organizations should consider the broad applicability of task-oriented quality measures.** By focusing on specific tasks important to the job (as well as general abilities and overall effectiveness), the effort can produce information that can have multiple purposes. As was discussed earlier, ratings on employees' performance in various task areas can serve as evaluative measures of systems operating in organizations—and can be especially useful for evaluating changes in those systems. Since supervisors are critical to the success of so many systems and programs implemented throughout the Government (e.g., employee empowerment efforts, performance management systems), assessing their effectiveness in performing tasks related to those systems and programs can provide valuable insight into their operation. Such information can also provide clues as to further modifications that may be necessary for the successful operation of the systems.

2. **Organizations which are trying to develop tools to measure quality should also consider a multifaceted approach to assessment.** As was demonstrated in this study, how well a person is performing depends on whom you ask. Thus, organizations would probably do well to look at quality from the perspectives of employees at different organizational levels (if the quality of nonsupervisory employees is being assessed, it might be worthwhile to have coworkers rate one another's performance). Along this same line, organizations might also consider evaluating some of the factors outside the supervisors' direct control which can influence the effectiveness of performance, such as the external environments in which the supervisors operate. And if there are things about those factors which can be modified to make it easier for supervisors to perform more effectively, every effort should be made to bring about the needed change.

3. **Organizations should focus supervisory training and development efforts on those performance areas most in need of improvement.** Although the results of the present study have demonstrated fairly high levels of performance in many areas, there are still some areas of performance (such as communication and

performance management) that need improving. As was previously noted, tailoring training programs to meet individual needs is a more efficient and effective approach to improving performance than the more typical approach of sending all supervisors to the same general training courses. And as budgets get tighter, it becomes even more critical that policymakers use training resources wisely to ensure that our first-line supervisors are performing at the very highest levels.

Unfortunately, supervisory training is an area that has not received the attention it warrants in many Federal organizations. Perhaps because of time or budget constraints, many first-line supervisors are placed in situations without the necessary skills to perform the tasks required of them. But, in the long run, training focused on performance areas in which there are deficiencies should be well worth the costs. As one survey respondent noted:

> ** * * training will assist in maintaining a well-educated and experienced work base of supervisors, will reduce the amount of burnout and stress-related illness experienced by supervisors, and will provide a better work environment for the employees as well as the supervisors. For a new or present supervisor facing the current and future cultural work environment, it is critical that all supervisors receive more training.*

And training is especially critical for first-*time* supervisors, who may have been outstanding in their technical area but have little or none of the knowledges and skills required to supervise others. Also, if predictions concerning changes in our Federal workforce are realized, and more and more employees enter the workforce with fewer and fewer technical skills, adequate, tailored training of our first-line supervisors will become even more important. Judging from responses to our survey, these predictions about changes in the workforce (and correspondent training needs) may already be coming true. As one survey respondent wrote:

> *One problem is the decreasing capability of technical specialists to solve complex technical problems. This impacts the supervisor's role by requiring the supervisor to supervise more closely and in some instances perform the technical work. * * * Few [agencies] have structured career development plans; fewer still actually carry out those plans. * * * There is no structured process to develop supervisors. The result is tragic. Individuals who lack * * * supervisory skills [are] making decisions which undermine employee morale and agency cohesion.*

It is encouraging that some Federal managers and policymakers are very much aware of the need to ensure better training and development of our Federal supervisors and managers. As one Federal manager has written:

> *To improve the quality of Federal leadership and enhance civil service, proper leadership training must be revitalized. Managers and supervisors at all levels must have proper training if Federal employees, their agencies, and the U.S. civil service are going to survive into the 21st Century.*[11]

[11] David G. Edmiston, "Executive or Figurehead: The Plight of the Federal Civilian Supervisor," Federal Managers, Fall 1990, p. 17.

Additionally, partially in response to recommendations made by the Task Force on Executive and Management Development, OPM recently reorganized staff to create a Human Resources Development Group.[12] Among other things, this group will provide Federal agencies with an up-to-date management assessment tool, as well as models and ideas for training their supervisors, managers, and executives. Hopefully, first-line supervisory training tailored to the individual needs of the trainee will be one important component of their training and development initiatives.

4. **Organizations should reexamine their supervisory selection systems to assure that they are identifying the most highly qualified individuals for supervisory positions in the first place.** As was noted in a previous Merit Systems Protection Board study on supervisory selection,[13] many Federal organizations simply promote their best technicians into supervisory jobs, without adequate assessment of knowledges and skills relevant to supervision. The study also found that very few Federal agencies have employed innovative systems tailored specifically for selecting first-line supervisors, but instead, use a process identical to the process used to select individuals for all other types of jobs. Relying on an assessment process that emphasizes technical skills and abilities instead of skills and abilities relevant to supervision may result in the selection of supervisors who are not capable of performing supervisory tasks. Thus, if organizations are finding that first-line supervisors are coming into their jobs poorly prepared, selection systems should be evaluated to determine if they are contributing to the problem.

In summary, first-line supervisors are critical to the operation of an effective Federal Civil Service. The plethora of tasks that they perform on a daily basis may mean the difference between success or failure of an organization's accomplishment of its mission. While it is somewhat reassuring to know that they are perceived to be performing reasonably well, the fact that we identified problems in certain areas of performance is of concern. Unless these problem areas are adequately addressed through effective training and development, or through better supervisory selection in the first place, the problems are likely to only grow worse. We can ill afford such a consequence as we look ahead to much change and uncertainty regarding the future of our workforce and resources in the years to come.

[12] U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "Report of Task Force on Executive and Management Development: Status Report One Year Later," Washington, DC, October 1991.

[13] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "First-Line Supervisory Selection in the Federal Government," Washington, DC, June 1989.

APPENDIX - SURVEY SENT TO FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS

NOTE: Three different organizational level groups were surveyed in this study: first-line supervisors, second-level supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees. The surveys sent to participants in each of these three groups were essentially identical; the one reproduced here was the one sent to first-line supervisors.

U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD
Washington, D.C. 20419

Dear Federal Supervisor:

We would like to ask for your help. You're one of a relatively small number of Federal supervisors randomly selected to help us assess the effectiveness of current first-line supervisors in the Federal Government. We believe that one of the best ways of determining how effectively first-line supervisors are performing their jobs is to ask their opinions directly. This survey will give you an opportunity to participate by sharing your experiences and insight.

Different versions of this questionnaire are also being sent to second-level supervisors and nonsupervisory employees. By obtaining the views of different groups, we hope to get a comprehensive, balanced perspective concerning supervisory effectiveness.

You may complete the questionnaire at your work site or in the privacy of your own home. Please base your answers on your own experiences and opinions. **We will keep your answers confidential; no individual responses will be reported.** Please do not put your name anywhere on the questionnaire.

Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed postage paid envelope within 5 days after you receive it. If you would like a copy of the report published as a result of our survey, you may write to us at the address shown on the next page. If you have any questions concerning this questionnaire, please contact Dr. Jamie Carlyle at (202) 653-7210.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Evangeline W. Swift

Evangeline W. Swift
Director, Policy and Evaluation

FEDERAL SUPERVISOR EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY
FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS

This survey asks Federal supervisory employees to share their opinions and experiences concerning the job requirements and effectiveness of first-line supervisors in the Federal Government. In order to obtain a comprehensive assessment, questionnaires are being given to first-line and second-level supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees. This particular version of the questionnaire is to be completed by **first-line supervisors** only. As a first-line supervisor, we ask that you respond to the questionnaire from the perspective of how you view your own job requirements and performance.

If you are not currently a first-line supervisor (that is, you do not sign performance appraisal ratings) or you are not the individual whose name appears on the questionnaire's cover envelope, please do not complete this questionnaire. Instead, please write "do not include" at the top of the questionnaire, place the questionnaire in the return envelope provided, and mail it to the questionnaire processing center.

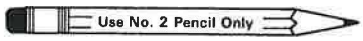
Completion of this questionnaire is voluntary and results are anonymous. None of the information you supply will be used to identify you or any other individual. Results will only be reported in summary fashion.

MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

- DON'T use ink or ballpoint pens.
- Erase completely and cleanly any answer you wish to change.
- Don't make any stray marks in this booklet.

CORRECT MARK: ○○●○

INCORRECT MARKS: ✓⊗◐⊙



PRIVACY ACT NOTICE

Collection of the requested information is authorized by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-454). Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and none of the information you choose to supply will be associated with you individually.

REPORT REQUEST ADDRESS

If you would like a copy of the reports published as a result of this survey, please address your request to:

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board
Office of Policy and Evaluation
1120 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20419

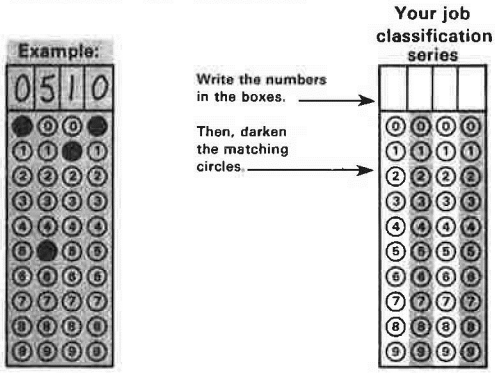
SECTION 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

The questions in this section of the questionnaire will be used to help study the job requirements and developmental needs for different types of first-line supervisory jobs. The questions should be answered based on your own job.

1. Your current pay grade:

- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10
- ○ 11
- ○ 12
- ○ 13
- ○ 14
- ○ 15
- ○ 16 and above (including Senior Executive Service)
- ○ Other
- ○ Don't know

2. What is your job classification series (e.g., 2005 for Supply Clerk/Technician, 510 for Accountant)? Please indicate the job classification series below, placing 0's in front of the number, if necessary, to make it four digits long. For example, if you are an Accountant with the job classification series number 510, you would mark it as follows:



NOTE: IF YOU DON'T KNOW YOUR JOB CLASSIFICATION SERIES NUMBER, PLEASE INDICATE THE NAME OF THE JOB SERIES BELOW (E.G., ACCOUNTANT):

_____

3. Are your subordinates primarily in the same occupational series as you, a different occupational series, or a mixture of both?

- Primarily same occupational series ..... ○
- Primarily a different occupational series ..... ○
- Mixture of occupational series (i.e., there is no predominant occupational series among the subordinates) ..... ○
- Don't Know/Can't Judge ..... ○

4. How long have you been a supervisor (including previous supervisory jobs)?

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1-2 years
- ○ 3-5 years
- ○ 6-10 years
- ○ More than 10 years

5. Are you:

- ○ Male
- ○ Female

6. What is your age?

- ○ Under 20
- ○ 20-29
- ○ 30-39
- ○ 40-49
- ○ 50-54
- ○ 55-59
- ○ 60-64
- ○ 65 or older

7. Where do you work?

- ○ Agriculture
- ○ Commerce
- Defense
  - ○ Air Force
  - ○ Army
  - ○ Navy
  - ○ Other Department of Defense
- ○ Education
- ○ Energy
- ○ Environmental Protection Agency
- ○ General Services Administration
- ○ Health and Human Services
- ○ Housing and Urban Development
- ○ Interior
- ○ Justice
- ○ Labor
- ○ National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- ○ Office of Personnel Management
- ○ Small Business Administration
- ○ State
- ○ Transportation
- ○ Treasury
- ○ Veterans Affairs
- ○ Other

8. What was the last overall performance rating you received as a supervisor?

- ○ Unsatisfactory
- ○ Minimally successful
- ○ Fully successful
- ○ Exceeds fully successful
- ○ Outstanding
- ○ Have not received a performance rating as a supervisor

SECTION 2. SUPERVISORY TASKS

You should answer the questions in this section with respect to your own job requirements and performance. Please respond to each of the tasks shown below in three ways. For each task, you should first indicate whether you perform that task. If you marked "Yes," please use the second scale to indicate the importance of the task for performing your job. Finally, you should rate your present performance level on that task. If you do not perform that task, you should not rate the importance of the task, nor your performance level on that particular task.

SCALES TO BE USED

A. Do you perform this task?

1 = Yes
2 = No

B. To what extent is this task important for performing your job?

1 = To no extent
2 = To a little extent
3 = To some extent
4 = To a considerable extent
5 = To a very great extent
6 = Can't Judge

C. What is your performance level on this task?

1 = Cannot do this task at an acceptable level
2 = Can do this task at a barely acceptable level
3 = Can do this task at an acceptable level
4 = Can do this task at an above average level
5 = Can do this task exceptionally well
6 = Can't Judge

	A Perform Task?		B Task Importance						C Performance Level					
	Yes	No	No Extent	Little Extent	Some Extent	Considerable Extent	Very Great Extent	Can't Judge	Cannot Do	Barely Acceptable	Acceptable	Above Average	Exceptionally Well	Can't Judge
A. Work Unit Planning														
1. Develop plans for work unit that include costs, personnel or material needs (for example, supplies and equipment)	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Estimate the resources (staff time, and/or costs) required to complete a job	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Develop work unit plans that extend beyond one year	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Determine whether proposed actions are technically workable	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
B. Work Unit Guidance														
1. Establish priorities among work unit activities and projects	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Schedule work so that available resources are used most efficiently	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Provide specific guidance on how achieving work objectives will be measured	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Prepare technical procedures used in work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Develop and implement procedures to keep work unit running smoothly	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Consider workload demands in approving leave and overtime	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
C. Budgeting														
1. Prepare or provide input into work unit's budget	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Use financial reports in managing work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Estimate financial needs beyond current budget year	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Keep track of work unit expenses and monitor against budget	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
D. Material Resources Administration														
1. Oversee or participate in managing work done by contractors	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Apply contract and procurement rules and regulations in managing work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. See that enough supplies and equipment are available to do the job	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Oversee equipment maintenance	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Prepare justifications for equipment or other materials needed by work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

	A Perform Task?		B Task Importance						C Performance Level					
	Yes	No	No Extent	Little Extent	Some Extent	Considerable Extent	Very Great Extent	Can't Judge	Cannot Do	Barely Acceptable	Acceptable	Above Average	Exceptionally Well	Can't Judge
E. Personnel Management														
1. Develop appropriate performance elements and standards	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Use performance elements and standards to assess employee performance and give feedback	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Use personnel management practices that support agency EEO objectives	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Apply personnel rules and regulations to selection and promotion actions and decisions	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Use personnel management practices that promote good labor-management relations (such as resolving grievances at informal level)	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Initiate recommendations for awards and discipline (written)	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Enforce employee compliance with required procedures (e.g., timekeeping, driver education, safety procedures)	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
F. Supervision														
1. Help employees identify their developmental needs and get appropriate training or experience	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Give praise for good work	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Recognize when employees are having difficulty performing work	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Maintain a balance between concern for people and concern for productivity	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Explain tasks so that employees clearly understand their duties	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Coach and counsel employees on conduct issues, that is, about behavior not related to performance	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Coach and counsel employees on a timely basis about their performance	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Monitor time and attendance and sick leave usage to prevent abuse	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Provide or arrange for the orientation of new employees	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Give on-the-job training to employees (or direct others to do so)	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Keep adequate employee records and reports (e.g., accident, injury, time and attendance)	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Make daily work assignments to employees	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Monitor and document employee performance	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Assign work to employees based on individual capabilities	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Allow employees to work without unnecessarily close supervision	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Make sure that employees have safe working conditions	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Assist employees in solving technical problems they have with assigned tasks	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. Do journeyman work in an emergency	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
G. External Awareness														
1. Keep up-to-date with latest technology, methods, and equipment relevant to the work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Keep up-to-date with the overall structure and functions of related organizations within the agency	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Keep up-to-date with regulations, policies, and administrative procedures affecting work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Maintain currency in technical knowledge required by job	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
H. Interpretation														
1. Identify and apply information from higher management that affects the work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Explain regulations, policies, rules, and procedures to employees	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Prepare letters, memos, or reports that reflect higher management policy and directives	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Keep employees informed of changes in procedures, policies, and rules that affect their work	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

	A Perform Task?		B Task Importance						C Performance Level					
	Yes	No	No Extent	Little Extent	Some Extent	Considerable Extent	Very Great Extent	Can't Judge	Cannot Do	Barely Acceptable	Acceptable	Above Average	Exceptionally Well	Can't Judge
I. Representation														
1. Respond to inquiries and requests from outside the work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Explain work unit projects or activities to nonexperts in terms they can understand	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Discuss work unit issues (such as work status, resource needs, and employee concerns) with higher level management or other persons in the agency	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
J. Coordination														
1. Maintain good working relationships with immediate supervisor and peer supervisors	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Keep supervisor informed of problems and work status	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Coordinate with other units to promote smoother operations and to maintain schedules	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
K. Work Unit Monitoring														
1. Adjust to changes in workload, resources, or priorities	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Spot irregularities in work unit operations before major problems occur	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Observe work in process to ensure that jobs are completed on time and are of high quality	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Document workflow and results	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Review work in different parts of work unit to ensure coordination	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
L. Program Evaluation														
1. Identify ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of work unit operations	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Critically and realistically assess the overall effectiveness of the work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Use project or job reviews or other evaluation information to improve work unit operations	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Assess progress toward achieving work unit objectives	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Identify ways to improve work unit procedures and methods	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
M. Communication														
1. Speak clearly and effectively	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Present ideas and facts clearly and effectively in writing	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Listen to others and show understanding of what they are saying	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
N. Interpersonal Sensitivity														
1. Be consistent and fair in dealing with employees	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Provide negative feedback in a constructive manner	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Accurately assess the strengths and weaknesses of others	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Realistically assess own strengths, weaknesses, and impact on others	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Accept and make use of justified criticism	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Achieve objectives by discreetly using power or authority	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Resolve differences through informal discussions or counseling	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Handle problems diplomatically	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Be accessible to employees	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
O. Leadership														
1. Actively promote cooperation and teamwork within work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Support higher management and policy decisions with employees	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Demonstrate a positive approach to employees—a "can do" attitude	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Make "tough" or unpopular decisions	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Accept responsibility for work unit and not "pass the buck"	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

	A Perform Task?		B Task Importance						C Performance Level					
	Yes	No	No Extent	Little Extent	Some Extent	Considerable Extent	Very Great Extent	Can't Judge	Cannot Do	Barely Acceptable	Acceptable	Above Average	Exceptionally Well	Can't Judge
O. Leadership (continued)														
6. Show respect and support for employees	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Set a good example for employees	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Conduct meetings in a way that achieves desired results	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
P. Flexibility														
1. Handle job pressures and stress	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Encourage open communication and input from employees	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Admit to and learn from mistakes	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Revise priorities and procedures when new information suggests a change is needed	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Be flexible in dealing with different situations and people	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Handle more than one problem at a time	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Encourge employees to be innovative and creative in dealing with work situations	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Try new ideas and methods to get the job done as effectively and efficiently as possible	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q. Action Orientation														
1. Manage own time efficiently	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Take action rather than waiting to react to situations as they occur	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Act decisively on own authority when timely action is needed	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Develop and implement solutions to problems that affect work unit	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Take the initiative in gathering information needed to get the work done	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
R. Results Focus														
1. Work persistently toward a goal despite opposition, distractions, and setbacks	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Be concerned with achieving final results as well as conducting day-to-day activities	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Do what is necessary to get the job done	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Set challenging but realistic deadlines for completing work	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
S. Broad Perspective														
1. Maintain a sense of mission in day-to-day activities	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Take into account a wide variety of factors that affect work unit efficiency and effectiveness	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Take longer-term goals into account while preparing short-term plans and schedules	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Define the "big picture" to employees (how their jobs relate to others, etc.)	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
T. Strategic View														
1. Recognize discrepancies and deficiencies in various types of information	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Be logical and systematic in analyzing problems and issues	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Identify patterns in events or information	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Recognize the key parts of a problem or issue	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Gather and share information through informal inquiry and discussion	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Recognize when to take action and when to "bide time"	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
U. Environmental Sensitivity														
1. Demonstrate awareness of sensitive agency policies and activities	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Consider the ethical implications of a given course of action	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Understand the importance of non-technical factors (e.g., funding, special interests) in higher management decisions	1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

SECTION 3. OVERALL RATINGS

1. How would you rate yourself on the following abilities?

— Ability to make efficient use of time

- Very low work output; perform generally at an unsatisfactory pace ○
- Low work output; perform at a slower than acceptable pace ○
- Good work output; perform at an acceptable pace ○
- High work output; perform at a fast pace ○
- Very high work output; perform at an unusually fast pace ○
- Don't Know/Can't Judge ○

— Ability to do quality work which meets acceptable standards

- Quality of work is usually unacceptable and does not meet minimum standards ○
- Quality of work is usually somewhat inferior ○
- Quality of work is acceptable but usually not superior ○
- Quality of work is usually superior ○
- Quality of work is always the highest ○
- Don't Know/Can't Judge ○

— Ability to handle multiple job operations

- Cannot efficiently perform a limited number of different assignments ○
- Can efficiently perform a limited number of different assignments ○
- Can efficiently perform an acceptable number of different assignments ○
- Can efficiently perform many different assignments ○
- Can efficiently perform an unusually large variety of different assignments ○
- Don't Know/Can't Judge ○

— Ability to propose, produce, or apply new and better approaches to products, processes, or services

- Work shows little or no creativity; make little or no use of new and better approaches ○
- Work shows limited creativity; make only limited use of new and better approaches ○
- Work shows a moderate amount of creativity; make moderate use of new and better approaches ○
- Work shows much creativity; make much use of new and better approaches ○
- Work shows exceptional creativity; make exceptional use of new and better approaches ○
- Don't Know/Can't Judge ○

— Ability to perform a wide range of tasks appropriate for the job

- Have few knowledges or skills required for the job; able to perform only the simplest tasks ○
- Have some knowledges or skills relevant to the job; able to perform typical tasks, but few of the more demanding tasks ○
- Have many knowledges and skills relevant to the job; able to perform most tasks, but only some of the most demanding ○
- Have almost all necessary and desirable knowledges and skills; able to perform almost all tasks ○
- Have all necessary and desirable knowledges and skills; able to perform all tasks ○
- Don't Know/Can't Judge ○

2. Considering all relevant factors, to what extent do you contribute to the accomplishment of the organization's objectives, goals, and mission?

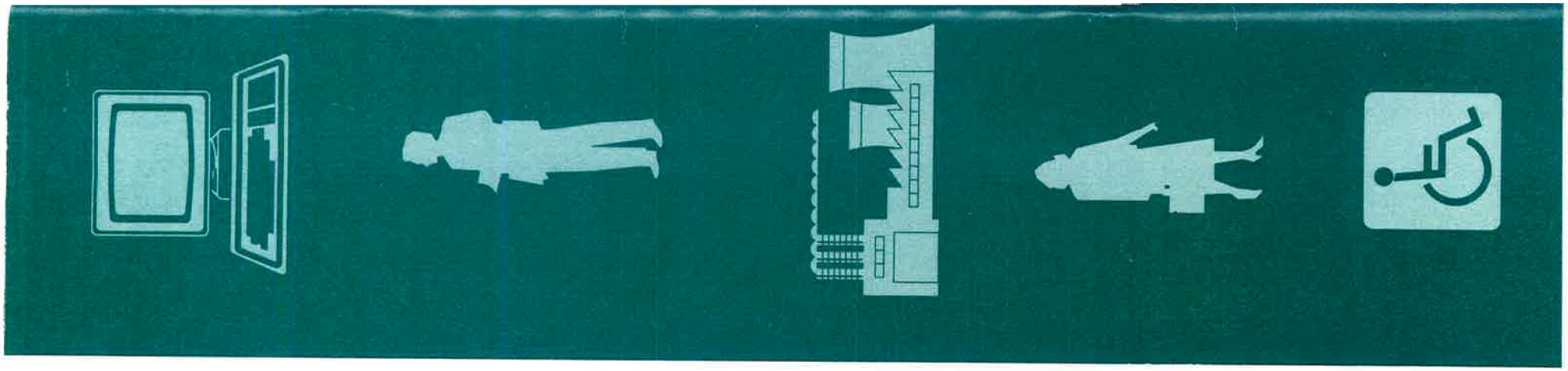
- Overall contribution is rarely positive ○
- Overall contribution is positive but not substantial ○
- Overall contribution is substantial and usually meets expectations ○
- Overall contribution frequently exceeds expectations ○
- Overall contribution typically exceeds expectations and serves as a leading example for others ○
- Don't Know/Can't Judge ○

3. How would you rate your overall quality/effectiveness?

Not at all Effective		Neither Effective Nor Ineffective		Very Effective
①	②	③	④	⑤

If you have any additional comments concerning your own job or performance that you believe would be helpful to us in assessing the effectiveness of Federal first-line supervisors, please provide these on a separate sheet of paper and include it with your completed questionnaire. Please seal the questionnaire in the prepaid envelope and return it to the private contractor listed below who is processing the results. Thank you for your assistance.

RESEARCH APPLICATIONS, INC., 414 Hungerford Dr., Suite 210, Rockville, MD 20850-4125, ATTN: MSPB-QFSB



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