insights & analyses for Federal human capital management

ISSUES OF MERIT

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Supervisors More Satisfied and Better Informed Than Non-Supervisors

Survey results indicate that there is a "satisfaction gap" when it comes to information sharing in the Federal workforce.

The Merit Principles Survey 2005 (MPS 2005) asked nearly 37,000 Federal employees about their attitudes toward their jobs, agencies, and motivations to work. Participants included members of the Senior Executive Service, managers, first-line supervisors, and employees with no supervisory duties. The survey findings highlight similarities and differences in how these groups see their work and, particularly, how they perceive information sharing in the workplace.

There is a trend across many survey questions for supervisors, managers, and executives (from here, collectively referred to as supervisors) to view Federal employment more favorably than non-supervisors. For instance, supervisors are consistently more positive about:

- Job satisfaction: 79% of supervisors are satisfied versus 70% of non-supervisors;
- Pay: 70% supervisors, 59% non-supervisors;
- Their supervisor: 71% supervisors, 63% non-supervisors; and
- How their agency treats them in employment-related matters: 71% supervisors, 58% non-supervisors.

While supervisors and non-supervisors have their differences, they also agree on some issues. Just over a third in each group (37%) report that their agency's organizational structure has been stable during the past 2 years. Only about 40 percent of each group are satisfied with their organization's performance appraisal system.

On the other hand, there are a few—very few—questions in which the "supervisor-is-happier" trend reverses. As an example of when this does occur, fewer supervisors (60%) than non-supervisors (65%) agree that they have the resources needed to do their jobs.

However, it appears that these resources may not include access to work-related information. Survey results reveal that there is a "satisfaction gap" with respect to information sharing in the Federal workplace. Supervisors tend to feel more well-informed than non-supervisors, as illustrated by responses to several survey questions.

More supervisors (78%, versus 57% for non-supervisors) believe information is shared freely in their work

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We offer insights and analyses on topics related to Federal human capital management, particularly findings and recommendations from our independent research.

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DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Supervisory Selection in the "New World"

As agencies move toward pay for performance personnel systems, the way we select supervisors becomes even more important.

In my September Director's column, I highlighted the increasing importance that traditional managerial roles are likely to play as pay for performance systems are implemented at the Departments of Defense (DoD) and Homeland Security (DHS). The article urges Federal agencies to carefully examine how they select supervisors to ensure they focus on managerial capabilities rather than technical expertise, as is so often the case.

In particular, supervisory candidates need to be adept at selecting employees, communicating with them, evaluating performance, and managing time. These facets of supervising become all the more important in a pay for performance environment where supervisors have more authority and their actions are even more consequential. The question is whether agencies are heeding this warning.

To help answer this question, we recently reviewed a randomly selected set of DoD and DHS supervisory vacancy announcements. Specifically, we looked at whether supervisory candidates are being assessed on their technical expertise or on the skills needed to perform the supervisory roles outlined above. Our findings suggest that these agencies could be doing a better job at assessing for supervisory skills.

Only a small percentage of the DoD announcements referenced experience in employee selection, communication, performance evaluation, or time management as being required or desirable. In contrast, over half of the DHS announcements asked applicants about their experience in at least one of these tasks. The most common qualifying experiences referenced in the DHS announcements dealt with evaluating performance and selecting employees for vacancies. The skills related to communicating organizational goals to employees and managing time were referenced the least by the announcements we reviewed.

Surprisingly, only about one-third of the DoD announcements cited *any* type of supervisory skills as being required or even desirable for the position. This means that fully two-thirds of the announcements reviewed focused their selection criteria exclusively on demonstrated technical skills or experience.

It is understandable why agencies focus their selection efforts on technical expertise. Simply put, it's easier to measure. To get the best candidates,

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Selecting Supervisors

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agencies may be selecting from applicants who have no previous supervisory experience. In that case, they must evaluate a candidate's potential to be a good supervisor. Many agencies don't do this well. Assessing an applicant's demonstrated competence, training, or experience in a specific field is much less complicated than assessing their future potential in an unknown area. Unfortunately, there is little guidance for agencies to use in developing these types of assessments. In addition, these types of predictive assessments take time and money to develop.

One type of assessment that could be useful in selecting for potential is the supervisory probationary period. As the Merit System Protection Board (MSPB) pointed out in a recent study, the probationary period can be an effective tool in evaluating a candidate's potential to do a job because it allows the agency to observe the person before the appointment becomes final. However, employment statistics indicate that few agencies separate new supervisors who are not a good fit for the position. This leads us to believe that the supervisory probationary period is not frequently being used as an effective assessment tool.

When supervisors are selected solely on their technical ability, increased pressure is placed on the systems that develop and manage these supervisors. Under these circumstances, providing inadequate training or overburdening these supervisors with technical work will only exacerbate their lack of supervisory skills. DoD and DHS have committed to training their supervisors on how to implement their respective pay for performance systems. However, both agencies should work to achieve a better balance between technical expertise and supervisory capability in selecting those who will play such a vital role in realizing the promise of pay for performance. ❖

Steve Nelson
Director, Policy and Evaluation

Information Gap

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units. More supervisors (80%, contrasting with 63% of non-supervisors) report that a spirit of cooperation and teamwork conducive to information sharing exists in their work units. Supervisors have a moderate level of trust in their own supervisors (69%) and upper management (60%) to keep them informed. Non-supervisors are less likely to believe that they will be given important information by their supervisors (59%) and upper management (49%).

Why do non-supervisory employees believe that they are less informed than do supervisory employees? There could be several explanations. It is possible that, as the data indicates, supervisors are not sharing information as effectively as they could. But we need to remember that our survey data comes from employee perceptions, not from strictly objective measures. Another reason could be that employees may worry when they do not have details about impending changes in organizational structure or policy. Often this information is not shared because it does not yet exist. Supervisors are not holding back—they just don't know. Sometimes barriers to information sharing exist because some employees are "difficult" to talk with. Employees who are hard to engage in discussion will not experience the information benefits of frequent interaction with supervisors or coworkers.

Whatever the reasons, it is important that agency leaders, from political appointees to first-level supervisors, realize that their front-line employees may need to feel—and even *be*—better informed. Note that fewer employees than supervisors believe they can openly express concerns (66% versus 76%), or that their opinions count at work (52% versus 70%). Therefore, employees may be less likely to raise their information sharing concerns directly. Leaders should take the initiative to begin closing the information gap in their own organizations. Employees also have a responsibility to facilitate information sharing by reducing barriers to communication and having realistic expectations when information they want is not available. Cooperation on both sides of the supervisory "fence" will open the gate and allow information to pass freely in both directions. ❖

Veterans and Hiring for Federal Jobs

A breakdown of which civil service occupations veterans are more and less likely to fill.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recently issued *The Employment of Veterans in the Federal Government FY 2004*, a report on the hiring of persons with veteran status for Federal jobs. The report found that veterans fill approximately one-quarter of all full-time positions in the Federal Government. Put another way, 453,725 of the 1,810,852 full-time Federal employees in 2004 were veterans. By comparison, veterans only make up about 9 percent of the overall civilian workforce, which includes all working men and women at least 18 years of age. Additionally, during 2004, slightly more than one-third of those hired into full-time Federal positions were veterans and almost 7 percent of these were filled with 30 percent or more disabled veterans.

The employment of veterans did vary significantly by agency, with the Department of Defense (DoD) as the largest employer of veterans. In fact, DoD employed more than 50 percent of the veterans in the Federal workforce, and accounted for the hiring of 55 percent of all disabled veterans and 56 percent of all 30 percent or more disabled veterans. Other executive departments that hired a high percentage of veterans included the Departments of Transportation, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, and Energy. The Departments of the Treasury, Agriculture, Education, and Health and Human Services hired the lowest percentage of veterans.

Although not discussed in the OPM report, our review of Federal hiring data revealed that there were also significant differences in the hiring of veterans by occupation.[1] Table 1 shows the occupations in which at least 200 people were hired into full-time permanent positions during fiscal year 2004 and for which the highest percentage of veterans were hired. As shown, veterans were frequently hired into positions involving technical skills—many learned through military training—such as security, law enforcement, training, electronics, telecommunications, and the use of heavy equipment.

In comparison, Table 2 shows occupations where again at least 200 people were hired during 2004 and, at the same time, were least likely to be filled by veterans. The chart excludes occupations involving student trainee hiring in which typically only about 2 percent of the new hires were veterans. Several of these occupations require specialized training, such as attorneys, pharmacists, computer engineers, and economists. However, other occupations, such as social insurance specialists with the Social Security Administration, do not appear to have the same type of prerequisite requirements.

These results suggest that veterans are often hired into positions that make use of skills acquired through military service and not into positions that require other specialized experience. There are exceptions to these generalizations, however, and it may be helpful to explore why these exceptions occur. ❖

Table 1. Occupations Most Frequently Filled by Veterans in 2004

Occupation	*Total # of Hires in the Occupation*	*Percent Filled by Veterans*
Training Instructor	323	76.8
Equipment Specialist	218	75.2
Electronics Technician	218	71.1
Security Administration	659	61.0
Quality Assurance	330	60.0
Security Guard	536	59.6
Custodial Worker	1219	58.7
Telecommunications	223	55.6
Logistics Management	501	48.9
Police	1519	48.2

Table 2. Occupations Least Frequently Filled by Veterans in 2004

Occupation	*Total # of Hires in the Occupation*	*Percent Filled by Veterans*
Patent Examining	426	0.7
Economist	226	2.2
General Biological Science	441	3.3
Computer Engineering	294	4.1
Foreign Affairs	220	4.5
Pharmacist	350	5.1
Forestry Technician	542	5.6
Legal/Attorney	1400	6.5
Social Insurance Administration	586	6.8
Internal Revenue Agent	822	7.0

[1]Data obtained from OPM's Central Personnel Data File

Due Process: What You Need to Know

An overview of what it means when a public employee holds a "property interest" in his or her job.

Special Byline from Ray Angelo
Attorney, Office of the General Counsel,
U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

Due process has been described as the way lawyers say "fair play." As with nearly everything else involving lawyers, however, it's not that simple. This article explains what due process means in the context of an individual facing removal from the Federal service.

The Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees, among other things, that a Government entity cannot deprive an individual of her property without due process of law. The Supreme Court has held that, where a law or regulation supports a Government employee's legitimate claim of entitlement to her job, the employee has a *property interest* in continued employment. Examples of the type of language that creates such a property interest include language that an employee may only be fired for "misfeasance, malfeasance, or nonfeasance in office." Another example is language that the employee may only be separated for demonstrating a lack of good behavior and efficient service. The wording of section 7513 of Title 5 of the United States Code, which applies to many non-probationary Federal employees, also creates such a property interest. That language states that employees may only be removed "for such cause as will promote the efficiency of the service."

Where an individual has a property interest in his job—in other words, he has completed his probationary period or meets the statutory definition of an "employee"—constitutional due process generally requires that, before he can be removed, he must be told of the reasons for the proposed removal and be provided an opportunity to respond to the decision-maker. The decision-maker at this stage need not be independent from the organization proposing the removal. Federal agencies comply with this requirement by providing a notice of proposed removal and affording the employee a chance to respond to a deciding official.

After a non-probationary employee is removed by his employing agency, and is thus deprived of his property interest in continued employment, additional due process is required. At this stage, the employee is entitled to challenge the agency action before a neutral and unbiased decision-maker. For most employees of the Federal Government, the Merit Systems Protection Board is that neutral decision-maker.

Pursuant to the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, MSPB succeeded the Civil Service Commission in that role. MSPB provides a bias-free and fair review for Federal employees who may only be removed "for such cause as will promote the efficiency of the service." The Board does this by requiring the employing agency to submit evidence justifying the removal, holding evidentiary hearings, and issuing decisions addressing the reasons for the removal. This independent review of the removal of a non-probationary Federal employee is required by nothing less than the Constitution. ❖

. . . Announcing. . .
MSPB Confirmation

On December 17, 2005, Mary M. Rose was confirmed as the third Member of the Merit Systems Protection Board, for the balance of a 7-year term, expiring on March 1, 2011. In January 2006, the President designated her to be the Vice Chairman.

Mrs. Rose previously served in a number of Governmental positions, including Vice Chairman of the Federal Salary Council, Chairman of the Federal Prevailing Rate Advisory Committee, and Deputy Undersecretary for Management at the Department of Education. She received an R.N. degree from the Bon Secours Hospital School of Nursing and completed the Maryland Registered Nurse Recertification Program in May 2000.

Please join the employees of the Merit Systems Protection Board as we congratulate and welcome our new Vice Chairman.

Observations by a Visiting Scholar

Tadaaki Miyagawa works with the National Personnel Authority (NPA), an organization that develops, administers, and evaluates personnel management policy governing Japan's national public employees.

Through the International Visitor Leadership Program, I had a wonderful opportunity as a visiting analyst with MSPB for the past 5 months. During this time, I conducted research into a number of issues, including gender equality which MSPB studied in its past report *A Question of Equity: Women and the Glass Ceiling in the Federal Government*.

Achieving a "gender-equal society" is one of the most important social issues Japan faces in the 21st century, whether it is in the public sector or in the private sector. However, based on a 2005 National Personnel Authority (NPA) survey, women are widely underrepresented in Japan's public service. The percentage of female employees under the NPA pay system is just 15.3 percent, and the percentage of female employees who hold senior level and senior executive positions is only 1.5 percent.

Realizing gender-equal participation in the policy and decision-making processes of the national government is critical to achieving a truly gender-equal society. Therefore, at the request of the Cabinet Office, the NPA formulated *Guidelines Concerning the Expansion of the Recruitment and Promotion of Female Public Employees*. Based on these guidelines, each Office and Ministry has developed a *Plan to Expand the Recruitment and Promotion of Female Public Employees* and has taken active measures to put them into play. While there has been some progress, there is much more to be done.

Today in the U.S. civil service, the merit system principles are in full operation in the recruitment and promotion of personnel due to the progressive efforts of the Federal Government. As a result, gender-equality has been achieved in the recruitment and promotion of women to a far higher degree than in Japan. Studying the policies, laws, Executive Orders, and other measures taken by the U.S. Government to address this issue has provided me with practical and useful suggestions to help achieve a gender-equal public service in Japan.

It has been an interesting experience to work alongside my colleagues at MSPB's Office of Policy and Evaluation. This group has 12 members with an equal number of men and women who share important positions. When I see these colleagues successfully balance both work and home responsibilities, I feel that the Japanese Government should aim for this ideal. I would like to express my appreciation to all the members of MSPB and to the U.S. Government for providing me with this opportunity. ❖

COR Training: It Really Matters

Various laws and regulations require that Contracting Officer Representatives (CORs) have training in Federal contracting prior to performing their duties as the technical monitors of contracts. There is guidance about what contracting topics should be covered in COR training, but historically, there has been no data to indicate whether training in certain topics has any relationship to improved contract outcomes. That is, until now.

In our upcoming report on CORs, MSPB looks at how much training CORs receive in: 1) contracting topics, 2) technical or functional areas, and 3) general competencies. We compare this data to CORs' ratings of contract outcomes in terms of the quality, timeliness, completeness, and cost of contract deliverables. Our findings indicate that more training in each of these three areas relates to more positive contract outcomes in one or more of the four contract outcome areas. In other words, there is a correlation between COR training and contract outcomes.

For instance, when considering contracting topics, we find that CORs who reported more positive outcomes in contract quality, completeness, and cost also reported receiving more training in contracting topics such as the legal aspects of representing the Government, contracting ethics, processing contract actions, and contract close-out. Interestingly, COR training is often not focused on the contracting topics that are most directly related to contract outcomes. While many COR contracting courses focus heavily on documentation and the regulations concerning

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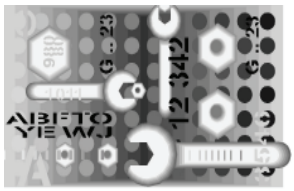
TOOLS OF THE TRADE



USAJOBS Resume Search: Another Way to Find Highly Qualified Applicants

For more information on these USAJOBS features, contact your Human Resources Specialist or go to www.usajobs.gov and click on "Employer Services" to view user-friendly tutorials on performing resume searches.

OPM created USAJOBS to serve as the central source for Federal job postings. But that doesn't mean you should post a vacancy announcement and simply sit back and hope that highly qualified applicants come to you. Instead, you should be proactive and use the search capability of USAJOBS to "mine" resumes for prospective employees with the qualifications you seek.

For example, you can search by keyword to identify specific qualifications in addition to seeking out any combination of the following candidate characteristics:

- Most recent job title or description
- Schools attended
- Location (current or desired)
- Education level
- Work type (e.g., permanent, temporary)
- Work schedule (e.g., full time)

Once you've submitted a search, you can view the resumes that best match your criteria. Depending on the number and relevance of the resumes returned, you can refine your search terms to broaden or narrow the scope. Once you've identified candidates of interest, you can send them e-mail encouraging them to apply for your vacancy announcement.

If your search is ongoing, you can also save your lists of desired qualifications for each job to be filled. Then you have two options: 1) you can later re-run the same criteria or 2) you can have USAJOBS notify you via e-mail when a candidate submits a resume that matches your search criteria.

The USAJOBS website has other features that can help you reach a broader audience—that is, everyone who views the USAJOBS home page. You can advertise your opening under the "Featured Job" or "Featured Employer" sections. A little marketing of your organization can go a long way to help generate interest in your vacancies. By sharing information, you won't simply increase the number of applicants, but you will also stand a better chance of narrowing the pool to those who would be best-suited for the position.

Bottom line—don't just passively wait for good applicants to come to you. Instead, meet them halfway by searching for the candidates with the qualifications you seek, marketing the job opportunity, and letting prospective applicants know what you have to offer. ❖

COR Training

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competition and method of contracting, there is only a limited relationship between these topics and the four contract outcomes.

Overall, we find that CORs who report more training in specific contracting topics, whether in their technical area or in other general competencies, also report more positive contract outcomes, especially in terms of quality and cost. Our report contains more detailed information about which training is related to which outcomes, about the CORs' perception of their training, and about the usefulness of various training methods. Using this information can help agencies better focus their training resources on the areas that meet the CORs' needs and that relate to more positive contract outcomes. ❖

Coming Soon... Fair Treatment Focus Groups

The Office of Policy and Evaluation is conducting an update of the 1992 Glass Ceiling study and the 1996 Fair and Equitable Treatment study. These studies examined the representation of women and minorities in the Federal Government. As part of our current research agenda, we will convene focus groups at various locations within the U.S. to obtain the perspective of today's Federal workforce on topics related to fair treatment. If you would be willing to assist us in organizing these focus groups, please send an e-mail to studies@mspb.gov and include your name, organizational affiliation (e.g., agency or employee group), work address, and phone number.

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Veteran Hiring in the Federal Government. *Following on OPM's recent study of veteran hiring in the Federal Government, MSPB looks at differences in veteran hiring based on occupation. (Page 4)*

Understanding Due Process. *Ray Angelo, an MSPB attorney, provides an overview of due process and the impact it has when taking adverse actions against employees. (Page 5)*

Gender Equality in the Japanese Civil Service. *A visiting scholar, Tadaaki Miyagawa, discusses the challenge of gender equality that Japan is currently facing. (Page 6)*

Make Sure CORs are Getting the Right Training. *An upcoming MSPB report demonstrates that there is a relationship between the type of training Contracting Officer Representatives receive and the outcomes of their contracts. (Page 6)*

Tools of the Trade: Using USAJOBS Effectively. *USAJOBS is not just a place to post jobs. Find out how to use the Government employment website to expand outreach to qualified candidates. (Page 7)*