Managing for Engagement – Communication, Connection, and Courage

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
1615 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20419-0001

July 2009

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

Dear Sirs and Madam:

In accordance with the requirements of 5 U.S.C. 1204(a)(3), it is my honor to submit this Merit Systems Protection Board report, "Managing for Engagement – Communication, Connection, and Courage."

If Federal employees are to invest their best efforts in serving the public, then they must be fully engaged in their work. This report focuses on how leaders can drive employee engagement and increase high performance through hands-on performance management; i.e., the concrete actions leaders from first-line supervisors to executives can take to facilitate the motivation and commitment of their employees.

Our research indicates that employee engagement is higher in agencies in which senior leaders build trust with employees by aligning their words and actions, communicating openly and frequently with employees, and treating employees as valued business partners. Supervisors in high engagement agencies define clear performance expectations, develop strong working relationships with employees, provide employees with useful feedback, and recognize their contributions. In short, the effort leaders invest in managing their workforce pays off in substantially higher levels of employee engagement and performance.

The recommendations we offer for increasing both engagement and performance can be characterized in three words: communication, connection, and courage. These are the foundation of performance management – communicating openly and honestly with employees, connecting with them as people to build good working relationships, and demonstrating the courage to address and resolve problems. Our objective is to provide Federal leaders with practical, action-oriented guidelines for nurturing the capabilities and passion of employees to ably serve their fellow citizens.

Respectfully,

Neil A. G. McPhie

Enclosure

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U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

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Executive Summary

As we conclude the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Federal Government is facing complex and unprecedented challenges both at home and abroad. The American public is relying on its elected leaders and the Federal workforce to successfully address these challenges. To do so, the workforce must operate at peak performance and with a strong sense of urgency. But how can Federal agencies better manage their workforces to achieve optimal performance? We believe engaging employees through effective performance management practices is an integral part of the answer.

Employee engagement has an enormous impact on organizational outcomes. Extensive research consistently demonstrates a strong positive relationship between high levels of employee engagement and desired organizational outcomes such as customer satisfaction, safety, low turnover, productivity, and profitability. Engagement refers to a high level of motivation to perform well at work combined with passion for the work. Engaged employees are absorbed intellectually and emotionally in their work and vigorously invest their best efforts in producing the outcomes needed for the organization to achieve its goals.

In a study published in 2008, *The Power of Federal Employee Engagement,* the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) confirmed that employee engagement has a strong, positive impact on organizational outcomes in the Federal sector. We found significant correlations between high employee engagement in an agency and several key outcomes including higher scores on the results portion of the Office of Management and Budget's Program Assessment Rating Tool, reduced use of sick leave, fewer Equal Employment Opportunity complainants, fewer cases of lost time due to work-related illness and injury, and lower rates of employee intention to leave the agency. In the current report, we explore how Federal managers can use performance management to increase employee engagement in their agencies by analyzing the results of the 2007 Merit Principles Survey and comparing the responses of nonsupervisory employees in the four agencies with the highest percentages of engaged employees with the four agencies with the lowest percentages of engaged employees.

The recommendations we offer to increase employee engagement are based on the principle that performance management is a continuing dialogue between supervisors and their employees. The actions we recommend are already key components of every leader's job. They can be characterized in three words: communication, connection, and courage. These are the foundation of effective performance management—communicating openly and honestly with employees, connecting with them as people to build strong working relationships, and demonstrating the courage to address and resolve problems.

Findings

Our findings are based on the responses of the 41,600 employees at all levels in 30 agencies who completed the 2007 Merit Principles Survey.

Effective performance management practices are a key factor in employee engagement. In our comparisons of the four agencies with the highest percentages of engaged employees with the four agencies with the lowest percentages of engaged employees, every positive performance management practice we reviewed (e.g., senior leaders communicating openly and honestly with employees; employees having written performance goals) is employed more widely in high engagement agencies than in low engagement agencies.

The vast majority of Federal employees take great pride in both their work and their agencies. Taking pride in one's work and workplace is an area in which the Federal workforce shines. Employees believe their work is important and meaningful and know how it contributes to the success of their agency's mission. The satisfaction they feel, which enables them to recommend their agencies to others as good places to work, is a vital component of employee engagement.

The majority of employees trust their supervisors and believe they are doing a good job, but higher level leaders are not as widely respected or trusted. Leaders, especially direct supervisors, play a critical role in facilitating employee engagement. Although two-thirds of employees express confidence in their direct supervisors, many employees do not have positive perceptions of their organization's higher level leaders. Employees' lack of trust in managers and executives may be a result of those leaders' failure to communicate honestly with employees about the organization as well as their lack of consistency between words and actions. Our comparisons of the four agencies with the highest percentages of engaged employees with the four agencies with the lowest percentages show that leaders in the high engagement agencies do a much better job of communicating with their employees.

Many employees do not feel free to express their opinions to management. A prerequisite to engagement is employees' perception that they can express their point of view. Less than half (46 percent) of all survey participants agreed that they could express their point of view to management without fear of negative consequences.

Most employees have written performance goals and the resources they need, but goals may not always accurately define current expectations. The majority of employees reported that their job responsibilities make good use of their competencies and they are usually provided with the resources, time, and assistance they need to do their jobs. Although more than two-thirds of employees said that they have written performance goals that clearly define the results they are expected to achieve, substantially fewer said the goals are current or accurately define performance expectations.

Many employees do not receive adequate feedback on their progress. Although research repeatedly shows that giving feedback to their employees is the most important and effective action supervisors can take to improve work performance, only 40 percent of employees at all levels said they receive informal or formal feedback at least every two weeks. Fourteen percent receive feedback monthly and another 14 percent receive it quarterly. Thirty-two percent receive feedback twice per year or less. We also found that many Federal employees are not benefiting from frequent reviews and discussion of their work with their supervisors. Forty percent discuss their progress with their supervisor only twice per year or even less often.

Substantial improvement is needed in holding employees accountable for results. Being held accountable for one's work is the most fundamental principle of performance management and is essential for ensuring high performance. Slightly fewer than two-thirds (65 percent) of employees agreed that they experience positive consequences when they achieve expected results and only 57 percent agreed that they experience negative consequences when they do not achieve expected results.

The management of poor performers needs to be improved. While the proportion of poor performers in the Federal workforce is relatively small, their management is seen as an important issue by employees. Fewer than one-third (30 percent) of survey participants agreed that their supervisor takes steps to deal with poor performers who cannot or will not improve. Rather than actively helping poor performers improve or removing them, some supervisors are apparently dealing with the problem of poor performers by transferring their work to others. Sixty-three percent of survey respondents reported that they routinely do more than their fair share of work because of poorly performing coworkers.

The assessment of employee performance is an area of concern. About 61 percent of survey participants agreed that their performance appraisal is a fair reflection of their performance. The accuracy and fairness of performance appraisals is a complex issue because performance ratings may be influenced by multiple factors unrelated to performance, such as supervisors' inability to separate individual performance from the impact of organizational processes and events; unconscious biases; impression management by employees; and, rating leniency. The complexity of performance assessment is increased by the human tendency to overestimate one's performance; employees believe they deserve high ratings and if they do not receive them, they conclude that they have been treated unfairly.

Only half of Federal employees believe recognition is linked to performance. Recognition of employees' contributions is vital to engagement. Only half of our survey participants reported that they are rewarded for providing high-quality products and services to their customers and that recognition and rewards are based on performance in their work unit. Just over half, 55 percent, said they had personally been treated fairly in the receipt of performance awards. Promotions are an important form of recognition that an employee is doing an excellent job. Fifty-one percent of all the survey participants believe promotions in their work unit are based on merit.

More attention is needed to employee development. Many Federal agencies are not taking advantage of the opportunity to engage their employees through personal and professional growth. Fewer than half (46 percent) of survey participants reported that their training needs are assessed, while only 58 percent reported that they have real opportunities to improve their skills.

Employees would like more input and involvement in their organizations. One-quarter of nonsupervisory employees and 35 percent of leaders believe that their input is used to make improvements in the organization. Half of all our survey participants are satisfied with their involvement in decisions that affect their work, while fewer than two-thirds reported they are proactively informed of work changes.

Recommendations

For All Employees

1. **Take an active role in managing your own performance.** If you need more guidance, direction, or feedback than you are receiving, ask for it. Reflect frequently on your own performance and consider how you can improve it.

2. **Adopt a continuous learning mindset.** Work with your supervisor to create and implement a focused development plan with clear objectives that include both enhancing your strengths and overcoming problem areas that may be impeding you from performing at your best. Be an advocate for positive change in your work group.

3. **Prepare carefully for progress review meetings with your supervisor.** Be prepared to summarize your progress on assignments and your accomplishments since your previous meeting. Bring a list of issues you want to discuss and questions you want to ask. Consider any barriers to high performance you face and ask your supervisor for help in overcoming them.

For Leaders at All Levels (Supervisors, Managers, and Executives)

1. **Hire with care and use the probationary period as part of the selection process.** The best way to avoid performance problems is to invest the time and effort required to hire only candidates who have a high potential for success in the job. Clearly define the technical and nontechnical competencies and other qualifications required for success before you plan your recruiting and selection strategies. Provide applicants with an accurate job description and a realistic preview of the pros and cons of the position. Use a multiple hurdle approach in which only the best qualified move on to the next step in the selection process. Use the probationary period as it was intended, as the final step in the selection process, and separate employees who do not perform well during this period.

2. **Develop a strong working relationship with each employee.** The essence of performance management is an ongoing dialogue between supervisors and their employees. Develop strong working relationships with your employees by talking with them informally and frequently (e.g., two or three times per week). Get to know them as people, provide informal feedback, and learn about their concerns and goals.

3. **Meet regularly with each employee to review progress and provide feedback.** Schedule regular meetings with each employee to discuss the employee's progress on current assignments and any obstacles that may be impeding success; provide feedback and recognition; explain new assignments; communicate high expectations for performance; provide information about the work unit or organization; respond to the employee's questions or concerns; and review progress on development plans. The optimal frequency of these individual meetings will vary with the employee, his or her assignments, and the job. Monthly is usually a minimum time frame.

4. **Model requesting and applying feedback.** Set an example for your employees by requesting feedback from them on your performance as a supervisor and by sharing with them feedback you receive from your manager. Discuss with employees how you plan to use the feedback you receive.

5. **Give all employees the opportunity to grow and develop.** Conduct annual or semiannual assessments of each employee's strengths and development needs. Provide development opportunities for all employees, including both specific training needed for the current job and wider skill development. There are many free and low-cost development opportunities available.

6. **Hold employees accountable for their performance.** Manage poor performance promptly and assertively. Hold all employees accountable for their performance by:

- Consistently communicating high performance expectations.
- Working with each employee to define individual performance goals with specified outcomes and timelines.
- Regularly reviewing and documenting employees' work.
- Meeting regularly with employees to review their progress toward achieving their performance goals.
- Providing frequent constructive feedback and coaching.
- Providing recognition and other positive consequences for good work.
- Taking prompt corrective action when employees are not performing well, making it clear that continuing poor performance will not be tolerated, and following up with negative consequences if the poor performance continues.
- Avoiding transferring low or poor performers' work to others.

For Managers and Executives

1. **Involve employees in building a high performance organization.** Use the results for your agency from the Merit Principles Surveys, the results of agency surveys, and additional employee input to identify strengths and weaknesses in your organization. Use this information to work with employees to create and implement an action plan to build a high performing organization.

2. **Build employee trust and confidence through frequent, open communication.** Invest substantial effort in gaining the respect and trust of your employees by openly sharing information about the organization, both positive and negative, aligning words and actions, and making it safe for employees to express their perspectives. Develop personal connections with employees through meetings, visits to work sites, exchanges of ideas, and other forms of in-person communication.

3. **Engage new employees with an onboarding program.** Nurture your investment in new employees by providing a year-long onboarding program that makes them feel welcome and valued, helps them build good relationships with coworkers, equips them with the information and resources they need to perform well, and helps them adapt to the culture and operation of the organization.

4. **Closely link recognition and rewards to performance.** Develop and heavily communicate to employees a recognition program that tightly links recognition to performance. Ensure that recognition and rewards are available

to all employees in all jobs who perform well. Use within-grade increases as a recognition tool. Award these only to employees who have met or exceeded expectations, i.e., performed at the "fully successful" or higher level, and let employees know they are receiving the salary increase because of their successful performance. Set aside more funds for monetary awards and distribute them judiciously, giving the awards only to those who most deserve them. Develop non-monetary recognition practices so that rewards are not constrained by available funds.

5. **Select supervisors who will effectively manage performance.** Select supervisors who can and will provide honest feedback and actively manage the performance of all their employees, including low performers. If supervisors do not effectively manage performance during the probationary period, they should not remain in a supervisory position.

6. **Hold every supervisor accountable for effective performance management.** Make it clear to all supervisors that they are personally responsible for effectively managing their employees' performance to produce results. Regularly review with each supervisor his or her management of the work group.

7. **Provide supervisors with the training, resources, and management support they need to effectively manage their employees to achieve high performance.** Provide supervisors with the support they need to successfully manage their work groups, including training, resources, and management support. In particular, remove organizational obstacles to taking justified actions against poor performers, and back up supervisors when they take needed actions.

8. **Evaluate the effectiveness of your agency's current performance appraisal system.** Determine if your agency's performance appraisal system facilitates or impedes the achievement of your agency's mission. Assess how it contributes to or detracts from accountability, communication, and recognition of good performers. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of different systems. Involve employees in the evaluation and solicit their ideas for alternative approaches.

For Consideration by Congress

Consider modifying the requirement for annual agency employee surveys to require employee surveys every two or three years. Determine if the high costs of annual surveys for every agency justify the benefits received. Yearly intervals between surveys often do not allow agencies the time required to analyze the data, implement indicated changes in organizational programs or practices, and see the results of those changes. In addition, the changes from year to year may be the result of variables not related to changes in employee perceptions or actions taken by the agency. Administering annual surveys also sets overly high employee expectations.

When employees are asked to provide input in a survey, they expect to see something positive happen as a result. When it does not happen because of agency resource and time limitations, employees may feel disappointed and disempowered and are less likely to contribute input in the future. Conducting employee surveys every two or three years would provide agencies with more accurate information about the perceptions of their employees than conducting annual surveys and allow the time needed to interpret the results and make indicated changes while reducing by half or more the cost of the annual surveys.

Employee Engagement and High Performance

The essence of performance management is a continuing dialogue between supervisors and their employees. It is communication and connection between two people who share the same goal of optimizing the employee's contribution to achieving the agency's mission. The forms, systems, formal appraisals, and ratings typically associated with performance management are merely tools; they are not essential for high performance. What is vital is the engagement of employees in their work so that they invest their best efforts in achieving the outcomes needed for the agency to succeed in its mission.

Employees' competencies (the knowledge, skills, and abilities developed through education and experience and personal characteristics such as conscientiousness and flexibility) add value to the organization only when they are applied to work. Motivation to apply one's competencies to accomplishing work is a key driver of strong work performance. We can define motivation in terms of the choices people make among competing alternatives and the intensity and persistence of effort they invest.[1] For example, a strongly motivated employee will invest a high level of effort in completing a task well and will forego other, possibly more appealing, activities, until the task is completed. An unmotivated employee will delay completing assigned tasks, will devote minimal effort to completing tasks, and may abandon a task if it is irksome or difficult.

There has been much discussion recently in both the academic and business literature about employee engagement and its positive impact on organizational performance. Engagement refers to a high level of motivation to perform well at work combined with passion for the work. Employees are engaged when they are absorbed intellectually and emotionally in their work and vigorously invest their best efforts to achieve the outcomes needed by the organization to achieve its goals. Engaged employees are emotionally connected to their jobs and organizations and believe they are doing important work. High performance is greatly facilitated when employees are engaged. Employees who are not engaged do not commit enough attention and effort to perform at their best. Two employees, one engaged and one disengaged, with similar competencies and experience can contribute to their organizations at very different levels because the engaged employee will invest discretionary effort in the work to do the best job possible while the disengaged employee will often do the minimum.

[1] A. Bandura, Human agency: The rhetoric and the reality, *American Psychologist*, 46, 1991, pp. 157-162.

There are multiple sources of motivation and engagement, some of them intrinsic to the individual such as conscientiousness, interest in the specific job responsibilities, and the centrality of work in one's life and the personal satisfaction derived from work. Other drivers of engagement are the support supplied by the organization such as a compelling organizational mission, trusted leadership, efficient work processes, peer support, and recognition for good work. Thus, although engagement is an attribute of the individual employee, it is dependent on multiple organizational factors external to the employee as well as individual competencies and characteristics. For example, an employee who is highly motivated and an excellent performer can quickly become disengaged and a mediocre performer if inefficient processes prevent her from doing her best. Conversely, a low performer can sometimes blossom into an engaged, high performer when placed in a job that is a better fit for his competencies.

With surprising consistency, research shows that 20 to 30 percent of North American workers are engaged in their work and that about 50 percent admit they perform only the minimum needed to retain their jobs.[2] Additionally, studies have consistently found that almost all workers are engaged when they begin a job but the proportion of engaged employees decreases dramatically thereafter. Six months after joining an organization, fewer than 40 percent say they are engaged, and the longer employees work in an organization, the more engagement decreases until only 20 percent are engaged after 10 years of service. Too many leaders are not taking the actions needed to sustain the initial enthusiasm and commitment of employees and, worse, many leaders do not recognize that they play a significant role in destroying employee engagement.[3] While we would expect a drop in initial enthusiasm from organizational entry resulting from habituation to the tasks and routines of the job, a drop this large cannot be attributed simply to the novelty wearing off.

Employee engagement has an enormous impact on organizational outcomes. Multiple research studies have demonstrated the positive relationship between high levels of employee engagement and desired organizational outcomes such as customer satisfaction, safety, low turnover, productivity, and profitability.[4] For example, an analysis of data from 664,000 employees from 50 global organizations showed that operating income in companies with high employee engagement improved 19 percent but it decreased by 33 percent for the same 12-month period in companies with low employee engagement; net income growth rose 14 percent

[2] R. E. Clark, Motivating individuals, teams, and organizations, in J. A. Pershing, (Ed.), *Handbook of Human Performance Technology* (3rd ed.), Pfeiffer, San Francisco, 2006 , pp. 478-497.

[3] K. Ayers, Are leaders destroying employee engagement?, *MWorld: The Journal of the American Management Association*, 6(3), 2007, pp. 38-39.

D. Tosti, Energy investment: Beyond competence, *Performance Improvement*, 44(1), 2005, pp. 17-21.

[4] B.J. Gorman and R.E., Why managers are crucial to increasing engagement. *Strategic HR Review*, 5(2), 2006, pp. 24-28.

J. K. Harter, F. L. Schmidt, and T.L. Hayes, Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: A meta-analysis, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87, 2002, pp. 268-279.

M. Buckingham and C. Coffman, *First, Break All the Rules,* Simon & Schuster, New York, 1999.

for high engagement companies but declined 4 percent for low engagement companies.[5] A study by the Corporate Leadership Council of 50,000 employees in 59 organizations found that increased engagement may result in up to a 57 percent increase in employees' discretionary effort, which in turn results in up to a 20 percentile point improvement in performance. Engagement also results in up to an 87 percent reduction in desire to leave an organization.[6]

Employee engagement is a valuable concept for understanding and improving individual and organizational performance. Employee engagement can be developed and enhanced by organizational practices throughout the entire range of talent management systems including job design, recruitment and selection, performance management, training and development, compensation, and recognition. This report focuses on driving engagement through hands-on performance management; i.e., the concrete actions that leaders at all levels from first-line supervisors to executives can take to facilitate the motivation and commitment of their employees. Supervisors play a key role in building employee commitment and engagement and thereby improving performance.[7]

The Merit Systems Protection Board recently conducted a study in which we confirmed that employee engagement has a strong, positive impact on organizational outcomes in Federal agencies.[8] We found significant correlations between high employee engagement in an agency and several key outcomes including higher scores on the results portion of the Office of Management and Budget's Program Assessment Rating Tool, reduced use of sick leave, fewer Equal Employment Opportunity complainants, fewer cases of lost time due to work-related illness or injury, and lower rates of employee intention to leave the agency. In this earlier study we assessed engagement based on employees' responses to the 2005 Merit Principles Survey questions in six areas that drive engagement:

- Pride in One's Work and Workplace
- Satisfaction With Leadership
- Opportunity To Perform Well at Work
- Positive Work Environment
- Satisfaction With the Recognition Received
- Prospects for Future Personal and Professional Growth.

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[5] Towers Perrin global database as reported in J. Koob, Mergers and acquisitions 2008: Don't leave employees behind, *Talent Management*, 4(7), 2008, pp. 52-55.

[6] Corporate Leadership Council, *Driving Employee Performance and Retention Through Engagement: A Quantitative Analysis of the Effectiveness of Employee Engagement Strategies.* Corporate Executive Board, Washington, DC, 2004.

[7] T.E. Becker, R.S. Billings, D.M. Eveleth, and N.L. Gilbert, Foci and bases of employee commitment: Implications for job performance, *Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 1996, pp. 464-482.

B.J. Gorman and R.E. Gorman, Why managers are crucial to increasing engagement, *Strategic HR Review,* 5(2), 2006, pp. 24-28.

[8] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *The Power of Federal Employee Engagement.* Washington, DC, 2008.

We concluded that overall, 35 percent of Federal employees were engaged, 47 percent were somewhat engaged, and 18 percent were not engaged. The percentage of engaged employees in each agency varied from 20 percent to 49 percent. Although engagement may have been defined somewhat differently in our studies than in other research, these findings suggest that more of the Federal workforce is engaged than the American workforce at large. This positive difference may be attributable, at least in part, to the meaningfulness of public service work and the job security enjoyed by Federal employees, two important conditions for engagement.

The objective of this previous study was to identify the drivers of engagement and their positive impact on organizational outcomes. In the current study, we focused on the performance management practices that fuel the six drivers of engagement. We explored how well Federal leaders are managing their employees to promote engagement by analyzing employees' perceptions of performance management practices in their agencies as reported in the 2007 Merit Principles Survey (MPS). We also compared the perceptions of nonsupervisory participants in the 2007 MPS in the four agencies with the highest percentages of engaged employees with the four agencies with the lowest percentages of engaged employees as measured in our study of the 2005 MPS. Through these comparisons, we discovered that every affirmative performance management practice we reviewed (e.g., senior leaders communicating openly and honestly to employees; employees having written performance goals; leaders holding employees accountable for their work) is employed more widely in high engagement agencies than in low engagement agencies. In this report, as we discuss the survey results related to each driver of engagement, we describe some of the differences between high and low engagement agencies. All the differences we found for the performance management practices reviewed are listed in Appendix B.

There is little leaders can do about the personal facets of motivation and engagement such as the centrality of work in an employee's life. Some people don't choose to invest themselves wholeheartedly in their work but derive most of their satisfaction and sense of accomplishment from other aspects of their lives such as community service or hobbies. But leaders can take multiple actions to substantially increase the proportion of employees in the Federal workforce who are highly motivated and engaged and thereby improve performance significantly. We applied our comparisons of performance management practices in high and low engagement agencies and a review of best practices in organizations to recommend actions that leaders can take to increase employee engagement and thereby maximize performance.

The actions needed to engage employees are already key components of every leader's job. They can be characterized in three words: communication, connection, and courage. These are the foundation of performance management—communicating openly and honestly with employees, connecting with employees as people to build strong working relationships, and demonstrating the courage to address and resolve problems.

Before We Proceed, a Few Notes. . .

Background The Merit Systems Protection Board conducts studies of the Federal civilian workforce to determine if the workforce is being managed effectively, efficiently, and in accordance with the Federal merit system principles. The 2007 Merit Principles Survey methodology and the 30 participating agencies are described in Appendix A. The survey is contained in Appendix C.

Perceptions vs. Facts It is important for readers to remember that survey data is based on the perceptions and beliefs of participants rather than on verified facts. However, people's perceptions largely shape their behavior. For example, if employees say they cannot freely express their views to management without fear of negative consequences, this perception affects the choices they make in the workplace. Employees will be hesitant to speak out if they believe there will be negative consequences, regardless of how management may actually respond upon hearing their views.

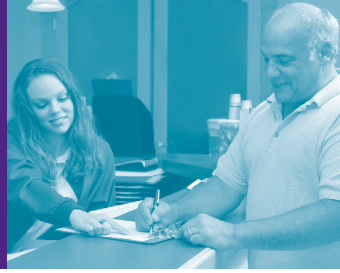
Survey Question Response Categories Five response choices were provided for most of the survey questions, e.g., Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and, Strongly Disagree. When five choices were offered, in most cases we report the results by combining the two favorable choices as if they were a single positive response and combining the two unfavorable choices as if they were a single negative response. For example, for the question, "Managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization," participants who selected either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" are reported as agreeing while participants who chose "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" are reported as disagreeing. This practice helps us more easily analyze and report the data.

Definitions of Terms In this report, we use the following definitions:

- Employees—the entire Federal workforce as represented by the survey participants
- Survey Participants or Respondents—the employees who responded to the pertinent MPS questions
- Individual workers—nonsupervisory employees who are not team leaders
- Team leaders—nonsupervisory employees who provide other employees with day-to-day guidance in work projects but do not have official supervisory responsibilities such as approving leave or conducting performance appraisals
- Nonsupervisory employees—individual workers and team leaders combined
- Supervisors—employees who have official supervisory responsibilities such as approving leave and conducting performance appraisals for individual workers and team leaders

- Managers—employees other than executives who supervise one or more supervisors
- Executives—members of the Senior Executive Service or its equivalent
- Leaders—all employees with supervisory responsibilities including supervisors, managers, and executives
- Organization—an agency, office, or division
- Work unit—an employee's immediate work unit headed by the employee's direct supervisor

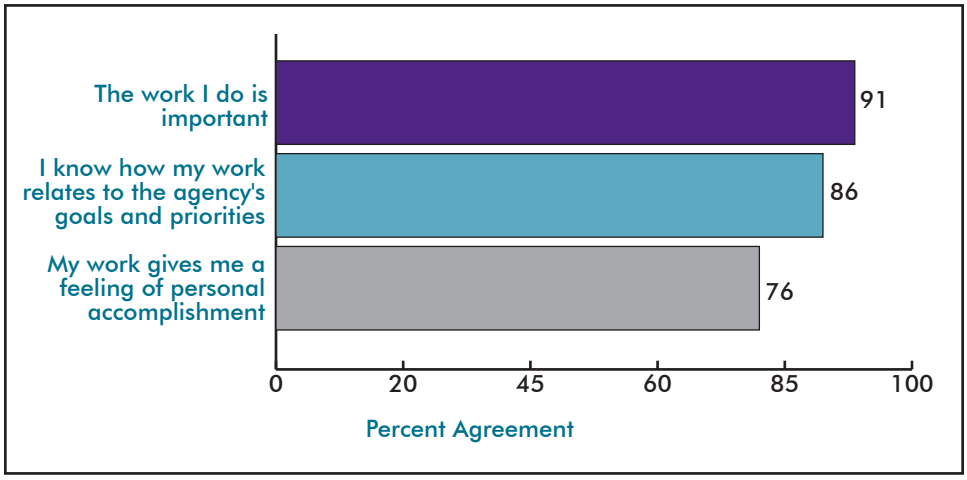
Engagement Driver One: Pride In One's Work and Workplace



Taking pride in one's work and believing that it is important is a vital component of engagement. In order to invest their best efforts in their work, employees need to believe their work makes a positive contribution to society. Employees must believe that their organization has a worthy mission and is successful in achieving that mission.

The vast majority of Federal employees take great pride in both their work and their agencies. Federal employees clearly feel good about the public service work they do and know it is important for their country's well being and prosperity. As illustrated in **Figure 1** below, fully 91 percent of our survey participants indicated that the work they do is important. Across all agencies, employees' agreement that the work they do is important ranged from 70 to 98 percent.

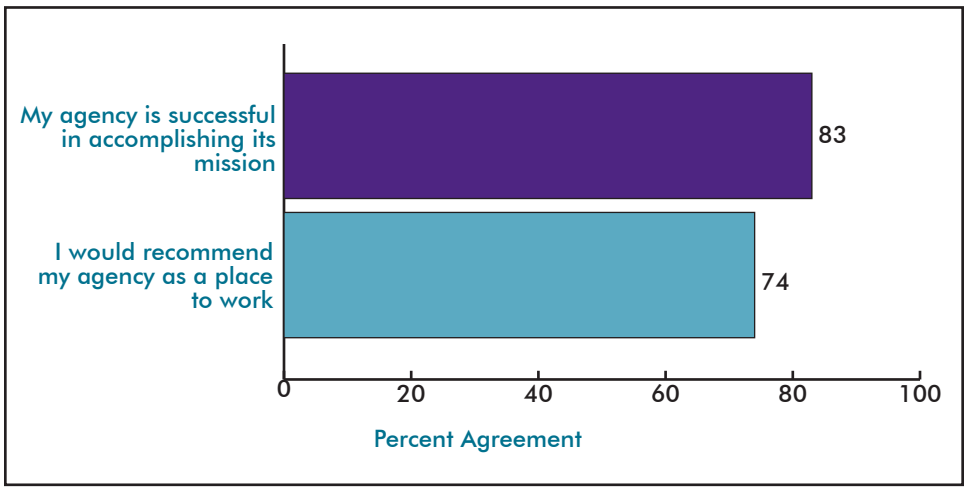
Figure 1: Employees' Pride in Their Work



Another source of pride for employees is the knowledge that their work contributes to their agency's success; 86 percent indicated that they know how their work relates to their agency's goals and priorities. When we asked the survey participants if their work gives them a feeling of personal accomplishment, 76 percent agreed it does. The level of agreement increased with supervisory status. Thus, 74 percent of individual workers agreed they derive a feeling of personal accomplishment from their jobs, while 80 percent of team leaders and supervisors, 85 percent of managers, and 91 percent of executives did so. We can hypothesize that leaders' greater choice of tasks and wider range of influence may contribute to their increased feelings of accomplishment. Leaders may wish to consider how they can further increase their employees' already strong sense of fulfillment in their work through providing more autonomy and empowerment to make decisions.

Everyone wants to be part of a winning team. It is important for employees to feel that their organization is successful to fuel pride in their work. As shown in **Figure 2**, a strong majority of 83 percent felt their agency was successful in accomplishing its mission, an increase of 7 percent from the MPS 2005 results. The range of agreement by agency is extensive, from a high of 96 percent to a low of 65 percent.

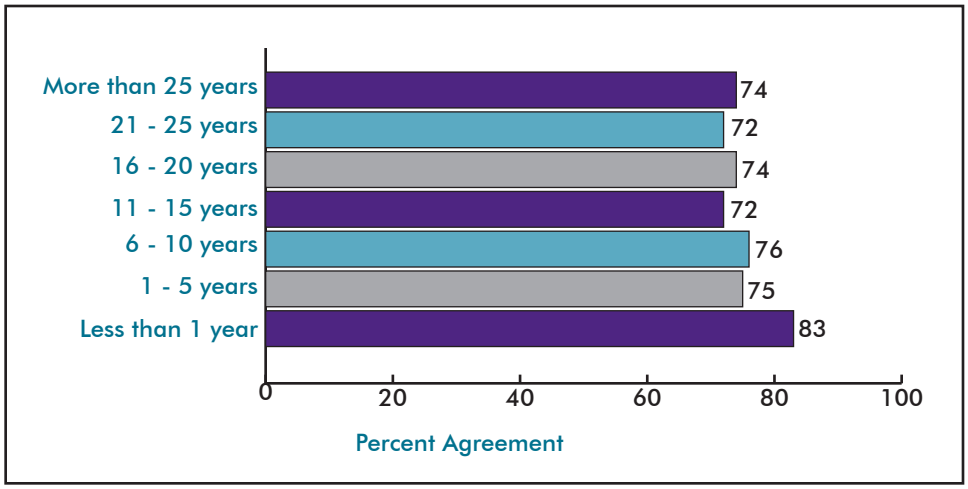
Figure 2: Employees' Pride in Their Agencies



A strong majority of Federal employees recommend their organizations as a good place to work. When they think highly of their organizations, employees recommend their organization as a good place to work to family members and friends. When we asked our survey participants if they would recommend their agency, a hearty 74 percent agreed they would. This is a significant increase over the 66 percent of participants in the MPS 2005 who said they would recommend their agency. The percentage of participants in the MPS 2007 who agreed that they would recommend their agency as a place to work steadily increases with supervisory level, with 72 percent of individual workers in agreement, 76 percent of team leaders, 79 percent of supervisors, 83 percent of managers, and 90 percent of executives.

When we looked at the survey results in terms of length of Federal service, we found that employees with less than one year of service were more likely to recommend their agencies than were more experienced employees as shown in **Figure 3** on the next page.

Figure 3: Employees by Years of Federal Service who Would Recommend Their Agency as a Place to Work



These findings are in accord with research that shows that newer employees have high levels of enthusiasm for their organizations that quickly diminish[9] and they reinforce the importance of managing employees to retain their initial enthusiasm throughout their careers. The percentages of employees in each agency who said they would recommend their agencies as good places to work ranged from 58 percent to 91 percent. The more appealing work life in the more highly rated agencies gives them an edge in recruitment, retention, and engagement.

Summary

Taking pride in one's work and agency is an area in which the Federal workforce shines. Employees believe their work is important and meaningful. They know how their work contributes to the success of their agency's mission and feel good about their contributions. The satisfaction they feel enables them to recommend their agencies to others as good places to work. Because every Federal employee contributes in some way to the welfare of fellow citizens, the work is inherently meaningful. A strong sense of the value of one's daily work facilitates engagement and creates a foundation for high performance.

[9] K. Ayers, Are leaders destroying employee engagement?, *MWorld: The Journal of the American Management Association,* 6(3), 2007, pp. 38-39.

Engagement Driver Two: Satisfaction With Leadership

The second driver of high employee engagement is satisfaction with leadership at all levels, from one's immediate supervisor through top agency executives. Leaders play an important role in engagement by establishing clear organizational goals and priorities; keeping employees informed of organizational progress; nurturing an organizational culture that supports goal achievement strategies; empowering employees with the information, resources, authority, and support they need to do their jobs; requesting and acting on employees' input; and recognizing employees' contributions.

Immediate Supervisors

Two-thirds of employees believe their supervisors are doing a good job. Research shows that the immediate supervisor is one of the most important factors in employee engagement. For example, research provides evidence that the immediate supervisor is the single strongest influence on employees' engagement in their work and that supervisors have an enormous impact on their employees' commitment to the team, organization, and job.[10] A study of the Federal workforce showed that employees' perceptions of their supervisors were one of the top predictors of agency performance.[11] In our previous study of employee engagement, we found that 87 percent of engaged employees agreed that their supervisor had good management skills compared to only 14 percent of employees who were not engaged.[12]

Immediate supervisors establish the work environment and link employees to the larger organization by helping them understand how their individual accomplishments lead to the achievement of agency goals. They make assignments, provide guidance and feedback, and review the employees' work. Through their actions or inactions, supervisors can make a great job frustrating and a poor job tolerable. As illustrated in **Figure 4**, 67 percent of our MPS 2007 respondents at all levels rated their supervisors as "very good" or "good." Nineteen percent of respondents rated their supervisors as fair and the remaining 14 percent rated them as "poor" or "very poor."

[10] J. K. Harter, Taking feedback to the bottom line, *Gallup Management Journal,* Mar 15, 2001.

Corporate Leadership Council, *Driving Employee Performance and Retention Through Engagement: A Quantitative Analysis of the Effectiveness of Employee Engagement Strategies,* Washington, DC, Corporate Executive Board, 2004.

[11] G. Brewer, In the eye of the storm: Frontline supervisors and federal agency performance, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory,* 15, 2005, pp. 505-527.

[12] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *The Power of Federal Employee Engagement,* Washington, DC, 2008.

Figure 4: Overall, how would you rate your immediate supervisor's performance as a supervisor?

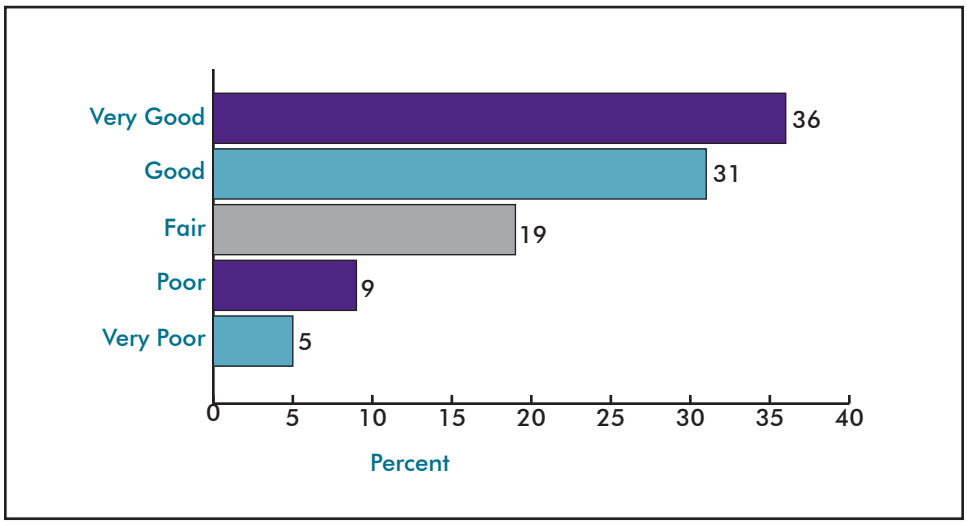
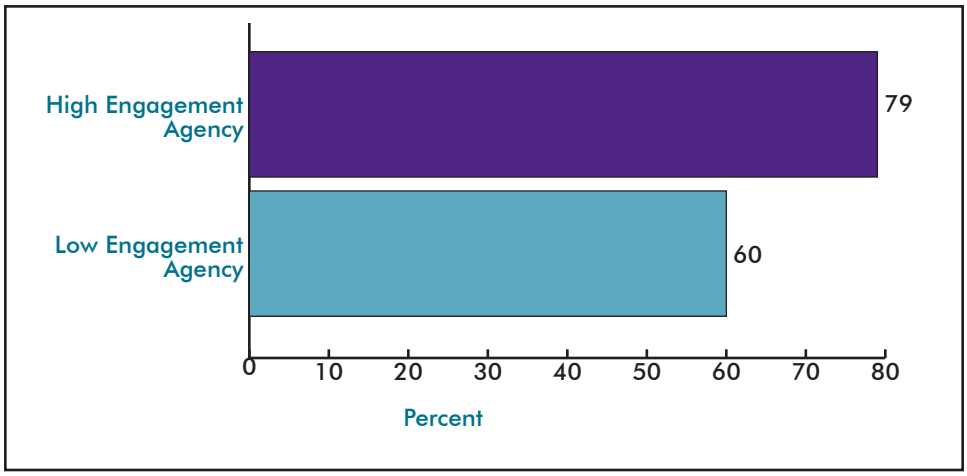


Figure 5 shows that 19 percent more of nonsupervisory employees in the agency with the highest percentage of engaged employees rated their supervisor's performance as a supervisor as "very good" or "good," compared with those in the agency with the lowest percentage of engaged employees.

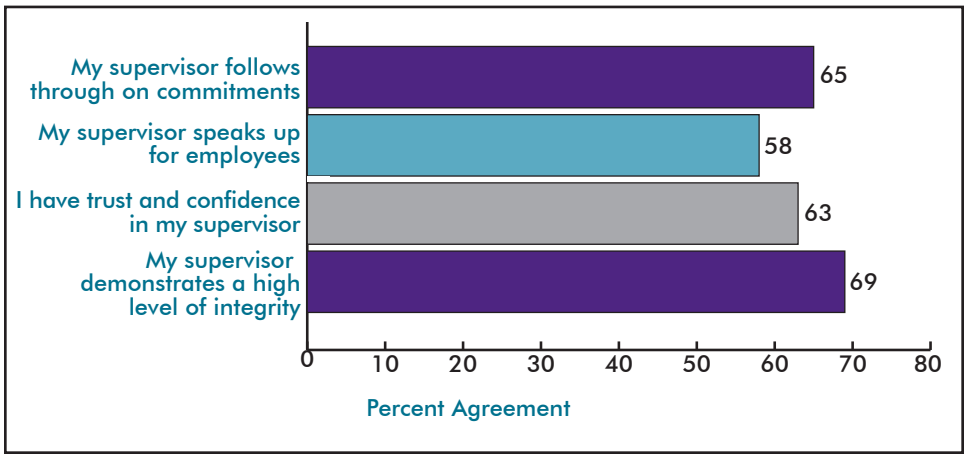
Figure 5: Non-supervisory Employees who Rate Their Supervisors as Good or Very Good



Although there is certainly room for improvement, employees' assessment of their supervisors increased considerably in the MPS 2007 compared with previous Merit Principles Surveys in which we asked employees to state their level of agreement with this statement: "My supervisor has good management skills." In the six previous MPS administrations from 1986 through 2005, the level of agreement ranged from 47 to 55 percent. Thus, employees seem to have more favorable perceptions of their supervisors than previously and given supervisors' strong influence on employees' commitment to their work, these favorable perceptions should enhance employees' engagement in their work.

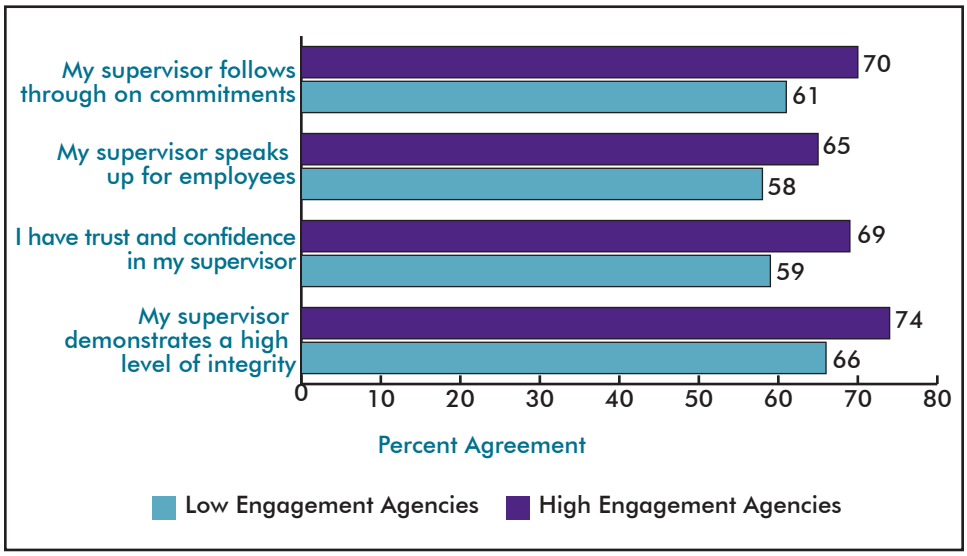
Employees have a moderate level of trust in their supervisors. In a series of four closely related questions focusing on employees' perceptions of their immediate supervisors, the majority of survey participants indicated that they trust their supervisors and see them as persons of integrity who keep their commitments and speak up for their employees. Participants' responses to each question are shown in **Figure 6** below.

Figure 6: All Employees' Trust in Their Supervisors



Trust in one's direct supervisor is an important element of engagement. The survey data indicate that a sizeable minority of supervisors need to work harder to build employee trust. We found that nonsupervisory employees in the four agencies with the highest percentages of engaged employees (high engagement agencies) had greater trust in their supervisors than did participants in the four agencies with the lowest percentages of engaged employees (low engagement agencies). The differences are shown in **Figure** 7 below.

Figure 7: Nonsupervisory Employees' Trust in Their Supervisors in High and Low Engagement Agencies



Managers and Executives

Although a majority of nonsupervisory employees expressed confidence in their immediate supervisors, employees have less positive perceptions of their organization's higher level leaders.

Organizational senior leaders are not generating high levels of respect or commitment. Only 44 percent of nonsupervisory employees have a high level of respect for their organization's senior leaders and only one-third believe that leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce. These findings are illustrated in **Figure 8**.

Figure 8: Nonsupervisory Employees' Respect for Management in All Agencies

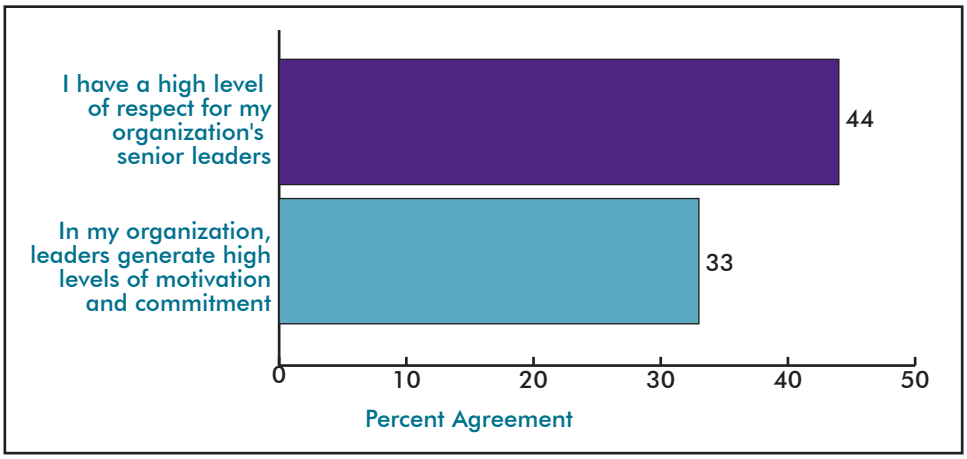
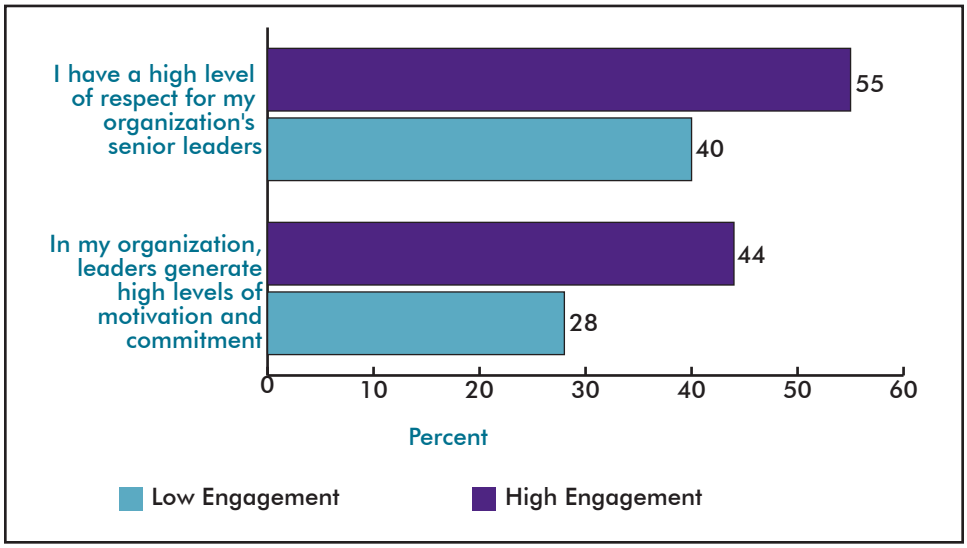


Figure 9 illustrates the large differences between high and low engagement agencies in respect for management.

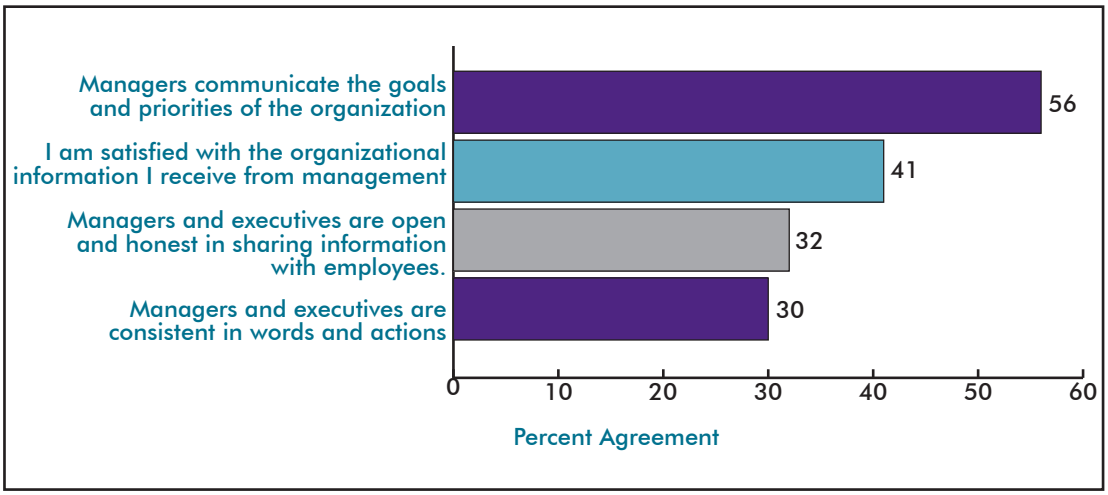
Figure 9: Nonsupervisory Employees' Respect for Management in High And Low Engagement Agencies



Managers and executives are not communicating effectively with employees. Extensive research demonstrates that frequent, open, honest communication between management and employees is crucial to generating trust and high organizational performance. Organizations that receive the "best companies to work for" awards have senior leaders who engage their employees through personal connections and communication. These leaders communicate frequently and personally to employees; speak directly, openly, and honestly to them; are easily accessible to employees; and provide clear direction.[13] Consistent with other research, our survey results suggest that the deficit in Federal employees' trust and respect for managers and executives may be caused, at least in part, by inadequate communication. As depicted in **Figure 10**, the data indicate that communication between these senior leaders and the employees in their organizations may be inadequate in three related but distinct ways:

- Managers and executives do not share enough information with employees
- Managers and executives are not open and honest when they share information with employees
- The information shared is not credible because managers' and executives' actions do not align with their words.

Figure 10: Nonsupervisory Employees' Perceptions of Management Communication



While somewhat more than half (56 percent) of nonsupervisory employees report that managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization, only 41 percent are satisfied with the information they receive from management about the organization. Substantial differences in survey results by role suggest that information is not being effectively passed down from senior leadership; less information is apparently shared at each step of the chain. Thus, 84 percent of

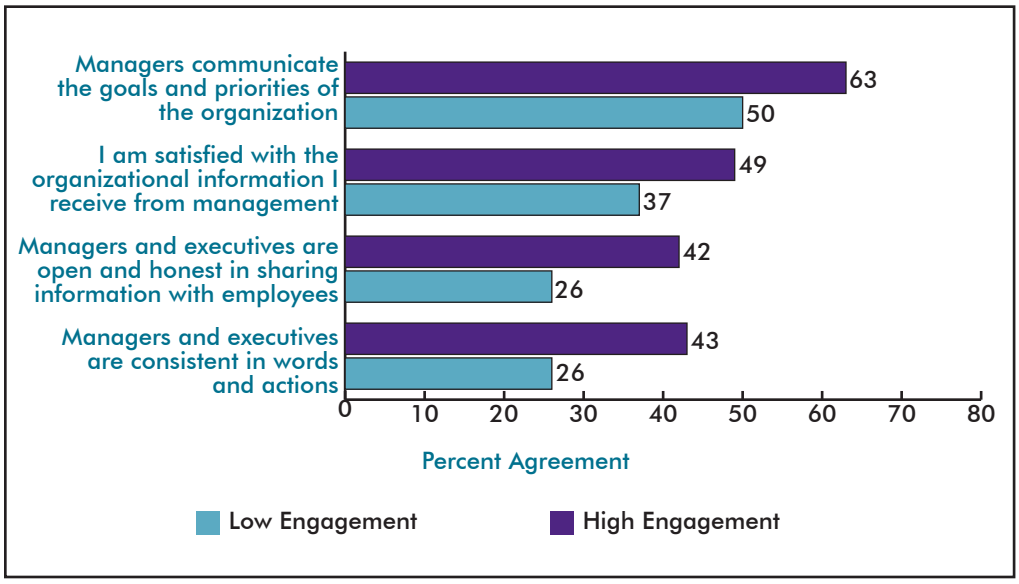
[13] E. Gubman, Engaging talent, *Executive Excellence*, 20(7), July 2003, pp. 11 ff.

executives, 73 percent of managers, and 66 percent of supervisors report that managers communicate organizational goals and priorities compared to 56 percent of nonsupervisory employees. Similarly, while 78 percent of executives, 61 percent of managers, and 51 percent of supervisors are satisfied with the information they receive, 41 percent of nonsupervisors are satisfied. The differences in employees' satisfaction by level may be partly attributable to the typical operation of organizational hierarchies. As employees ascend the hierarchy, they have more opportunities to receive information about the organization and are perceived by senior leaders as having a greater "need to know."

Only 32 percent of nonsupervisors believe that managers and executives are open and honest in sharing information and just 30 percent feel that these senior leaders' words and actions are aligned. Inconsistency between what leaders say and what they do releases a cascade of negative effects in employees, reducing trust, commitment, and willingness to invest discretionary effort in their work.[14] Credibility and respect take a long time to build and can crumble with a single untruth or inconsistency. Only when employees feel a sense of connection with their leaders will they trust them. This connection results from open, honest, frequent communication with employees that should begin when employees are first hired into the organization and continue throughout their career.

We found large, consistent differences in management communication with employees between the high and low engagement agencies. As **Figure 11** illustrates, management communication in high engagement agencies is significantly better than in low engagement agencies.

Figure 11: Nonsupervisory Employees' Perceptions of Management Communication Practices in High And Low Engagement Agencies



[14] T. Simons, The high cost of low trust, *Harvard Business Review,* 80(8), September 2002, pp. 18-19.

The survey data support our assertion that management communication and connection with employees is strongly tied to the trust and respect employees feel for management. In the high engagement agencies in which management demonstrates more positive communication practices, there is a higher level of respect for senior leaders and correspondingly higher levels of motivation and commitment.

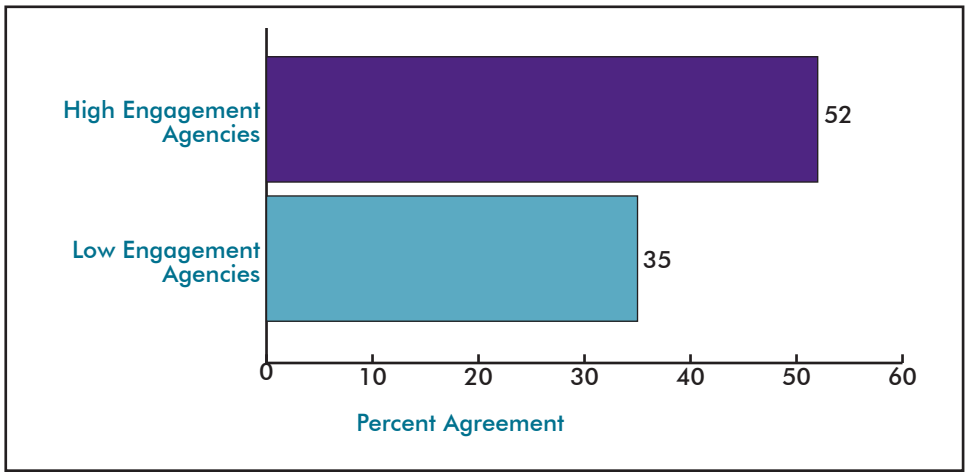
Employees do not feel free to express their perspectives to management. As we have discussed, the survey results indicate that many employees are not satisfied with the communications they receive from agency leadership. Many employees also believe that they are not free to communicate to management. Just 46 percent of all survey participants agreed that they could express their point of view to management without fear of negative consequences. Employees' responses to a related MPS question ("In the past 2 years, do you feel you have been retaliated against or threatened with retaliation for disagreeing with management decisions?") may help to explain why some employees do not feel free to express their opinions. Eight percent of survey participants said they had actually experienced retaliation after expressing disagreement with management, while 3 percent said they had been threatened with retaliation. It is possible that these employees shared their experiences with their coworkers and word quickly spread that it is dangerous to disagree with management even though a relatively small percentage of employees reported they had actually experienced negative consequences.

Open, two-way communication is a prerequisite to empowerment and engagement. Employees must believe that they can express their point of view without fear of negative repercussions. In addition, when employees do not feel free to express their opinions, many worthwhile ideas may be lost to the organization and there is the danger of creating an environment of automatic compliance in which ethical lapses and imprudent choices may go unchallenged. Federal employees' whistleblower protections are intended to support employees in championing the public interest even when it may not be in accord with the views or actions of their leaders.

The differences between nonsupervisory employees and leaders are substantial, with 41 percent of nonsupervisory employees and 54 percent of leaders feeling that they can express their perspectives. It is especially unfortunate that so many leaders do not trust their own leaders enough to openly voice their opinions. When lower level leaders are reluctant to voice concerns or suggest alternative courses of action, senior leaders may make poorly informed or unwise decisions at great potential cost to the public.

Figure 12 depicts the considerable difference between high and low engagement agencies in the percentage of nonsupervisory employees who agreed they could express their point of view to management without fear of negative consequences. The 17 percent gap confirms the importance of open expression to engagement.

Figure 12: I can express my point of view to management without fear of negative consequences



To create the positive environment of trust needed to engage employees, organizational leaders should communicate to employees that they may express their opinions and then demonstrate that it is safe to do so by encouraging open discussion and acknowledging it with positive reactions and consequences.

Although there are many challenges in the Federal work environment such as frequently changing circumstances and organizational size and complexity, leaders can and should improve the amount and quality of communication to their employees. Our data indicate that in the agencies in which leaders invest more time and effort in communicating with their employees, employees are more likely to respect the leaders and to believe leaders generate motivation and commitment. Thus, communication and connection with employees are shown to be effective drivers of engagement in the Federal workforce. There are many actions leaders can take to enhance communication in their organizations, such as sharing information more frequently and openly and demonstrating courage in sharing both the good news of achievements and the more difficult messages of uncertainty, mistakes, and challenges. Leaders can connect with employees by making sure they are accessible and visible to employees at all levels and by encouraging employees to express their opinions and share their ideas. Leaders also need to build trust by ensuring that their words and actions are consistent and, when necessary, explaining any apparent or actual inconsistencies.

Summary

The satisfaction with leadership driver is a challenging area for most agencies. Although two-thirds of all Federal employees rated their immediate supervisor's performance as a supervisor as good or very good, there is certainly room for improvement. Nonsupervisory employees' perceptions of managers and executives are much less positive. They do not believe that their senior leaders are communicating adequately and openly with them. Employees also do not feel they can freely express their perspectives to their leadership. The result of this lack of open, two-way communication is that many leaders may fail to develop the trusting relationships and personal connections with employees that generate motivation and commitment. Consistent, honest communication with employees should begin with onboarding programs when employees first enter an organization and continue with frequent opportunities for employees to participate in dialogue about the organization with their leaders.

Engagement Driver Three: Opportunity To Perform Well At Work

The third driver of engagement is the opportunity to perform well at work. No matter how competent or initially motivated employees are, if they are not given the opportunity, information, resources, or support they need to do their best, they may disengage from their work and performance will suffer.

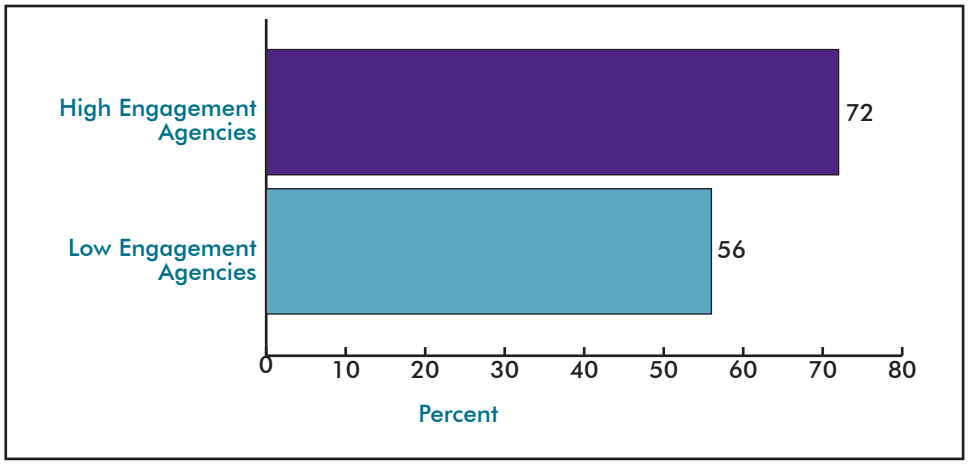
Using One's Talents

About two-thirds of employees believe their talents are used well in the workplace. For high levels of performance, it is essential to design jobs and assign work so that most of employees' tasks require the application of their competency strengths. People apply their best efforts to completing tasks that they perceive as challenging but achievable. If a task is too easy, they expend minimal effort. If a task is too hard, they become overwhelmed and don't engage in the work.[15] Sixty-five percent of survey participants reported that their talents are used well in the workplace. It is noteworthy that 63 percent of nonsupervisors in the MPS 2007 reported their talents were being well used while 75 percent of leaders thought so. This difference may be partly attributable to the fact that leaders may have more discretion over which tasks they perform and which they delegate, and they choose to do the tasks most closely aligned with their strengths.

It's a good start to have two-thirds of employees believing that their job responsibilities make good use of their capabilities, but Federal agencies may be losing an opportunity for improved performance by not making use of everyone's strengths. As shown in **Figure 13**, there is a large difference between high and low engagement agencies in employees' perceptions that their talents are used well. While 72 percent of non-supervisory employees in high engagement agencies reported that their talents are used well in the workplace, just 56 percent of those in low engagement agencies did so.

[15] J. Fuller, *Performance Management with Bottom-Line Results.* Presentation at the International Quality and Productivity Center Conference, Aligning Performance Management with Business Strategy and Goals, San Francisco, August 2001.

Figure 13: Non-Supervisory Employees Who Believe Their Talents Are Used Well



When people don't believe that their strengths are utilized, motivation suffers and productivity declines. Although supervisors may face multiple constraints in making work assignments, it is often possible to assign staff members at least some work that utilizes their strengths and minimize the assignments that require use of their less developed competencies. When feasible, employees whose strengths are not compatible with changes in technology or agency goals or processes can be assisted to develop new strengths that align with organizational needs.

Providing Direction and Resources

The majority of employees have individual performance goals that are linked to organizational goals and define what they are expected to achieve. Individual goals provide performance targets for employees by giving them a clear view of what they need to do to succeed. Employee engagement is facilitated when goals specify the expected work outcomes and timelines tailored to each employee's responsibilities and capabilities, and tie the work to larger organizational goals but allow employees to choose how to do the work. Along with the priorities supervisors communicate, goals serve as a continuing point of reference for employees as they make day-to-day and longer term decisions about their work. They empower employees with the direction they need to do their jobs well, helping them monitor and regulate their own activities and output to produce the results needed by internal and external stakeholders and avoid wasted effort.[16] In addition, clear goals provide a focus for employees and their supervisors to periodically review and discuss the employee's progress in comparison with expectations. Written performance goals facilitate mutual understanding and avoid situations in which components of goals are forgotten or misinterpreted. Goals are most effective in generating engagement when employees are involved in defining

[16] J. W. Gilley, Performance management applied at the performer level, *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 13(4), 2000, pp. 87-105.

the goals, both so they have a voice in how they will make a positive difference in their agency and so the goals are realistic from their perspective. Goals should be reviewed and updated as priorities and organizational needs change.

Seventy-one percent of survey participants reported that they have individual written performance goals that clearly define the results they are expected to achieve. Of these 71 percent:

- 83 percent said the goals had been developed, reviewed, updated, or discussed with their supervisors for the current performance period
- 85 percent said the goals accurately define what is expected of them
- 89 percent said the goals are clearly linked to organizational or work unit goals.

Areas of concern are those employees who did not indicate they have written performance goals and those whose goals are not up to date, do not accurately define expectations, or are not linked to work unit or organizational goals. These employees may not be receiving the direction they need to fully contribute to the achievement of agency goals. We found that 76 percent of nonsupervisory employees in the high engagement agencies reported they have written individual performance goals, compared with 61 percent in the low engagement agencies.

Discussions about individual goals at the beginning and midpoint of each performance period provide supervisors with an excellent opportunity to communicate organizational goals and priorities to employees. If these discussions do not take place, supervisors or managers may not otherwise communicate organizational goals. Indeed, our analysis shows that 68 percent of the participants who said their individual goals had been developed, reviewed, updated, or discussed with their supervisor for the current performance period agreed that their managers communicate organizational goals and priorities, but only 45 percent of those who did not meet with their supervisors to discuss their goals agreed.

Approximately 60 percent of employees are receiving the information and guidance they need. In addition to performance goals, employees at all levels need ongoing direction and guidance including information related to specific assignments. Sixty-one percent of survey participants reported that they receive the information and guidance they need to do their jobs effectively and efficiently all or most of the time. The remaining 39 percent of participants receive the information and guidance they need less frequently (27 percent sometimes receive it, 9 percent usually don't receive it, and 3 percent rarely or never receive it). These results may be indicative of lost opportunity. Without consistent guidance, employees cannot be expected to produce the results needed to effectively serve the public. When they are initially given an assignment, employees need to know the purpose of the assignment and its stakeholders; its context as part of a larger effort; the history of similar work and lessons learned; the resources available; the priority of the assignment relative to the employee's other work; the supervisor's expectations for quality, quantity, and due dates; and potential problems to avoid. As employees work on the assignments, the supervisor needs to be readily available to provide advice or assistance as needed.

Most supervisors are providing employees with the assistance they need. Approximately 73 percent of our survey participants stated that their supervisors talk with them or assist them when they need help. These supervisory behaviors both create a positive work environment for employees and provide the assistance they need to get the job done. Managers need to encourage the remaining quarter of supervisors to understand how important it is for them to provide employees with the help they need. If employees don't receive the assistance they need, they may ask their colleagues for help, figure out what to do on their own, or search for information, all of which may be fine in some cases but in others, it can mean that employees are not doing the work as they should, errors are being made, or much time is wasted. Not assisting employees may also send the message that the supervisor doesn't care about them or doesn't value their work.

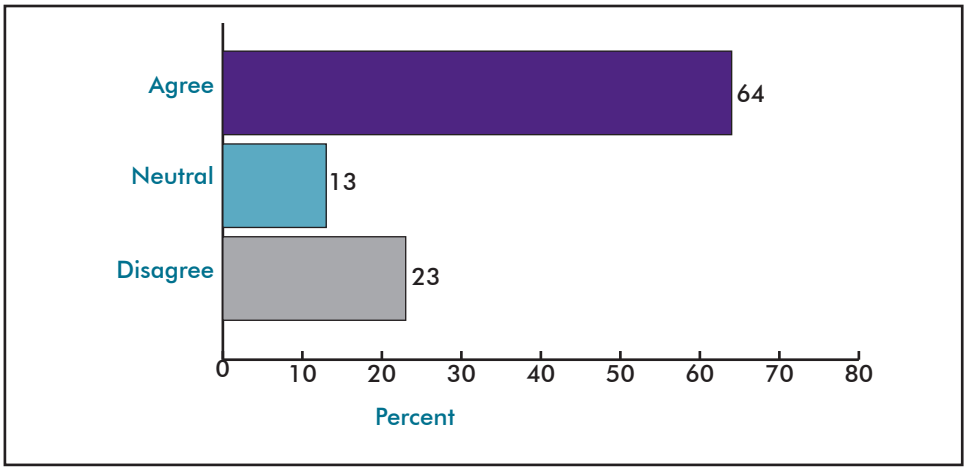
When we looked at the data by age of the survey participants, we discovered that the proportion of employees who felt they received the assistance they need steadily decreased as employees' age increased. Thus, 80 percent of employees aged 25 or under agreed that they received the assistance they needed, compared with 71 percent of employees aged 50 or above. This finding may indicate that both supervisors and employees could benefit from greater assertiveness. Supervisors should tactfully offer assistance to even very experienced or mature employees. Employees should request the help they need rather than remaining silent for fear of being perceived as incompetent or needy for attention.

Most employees usually have the time and resources they need. To achieve their goals, employees require adequate time and resources including tools, supplies, staff support, and reference materials such as handbooks and job aids. Although it seems obvious that time and resources are necessary to do good work, organizations sometimes do not supply what their employees need and subsequently, performance suffers. For example, employees may be told that a certain goal is a top priority but then may be assigned other tasks that prevent them from working on the high priority assignment.

A total of 69 percent of respondents indicated that they usually have the resources they need to do their job well, while 23 percent said they sometimes have the resources they need. The remaining 8 percent usually do not have required resources. We can conclude that most organizations are doing a good job in ensuring their employees have the equipment, support staff, supplies, and other resources required for effective performance but that a sizable minority need to focus on consistently providing needed resources. This question is based on employee perceptions, as are the other survey questions. It is possible that some employees would like to have more resources but the resources are not actually required for effective job performance or some employees may not efficiently use the resources they are given. In some cases, the agency budgets may not be sufficient to supply all the resources that employees believe they need.

Time is one of the essential resources for good performance. If employees have too much work to do, quality suffers or tasks are delayed or remain uncompleted. **Figure 14** shows the percentage of all survey participants who agreed that their workload is reasonable.

Figure 14: My workload is reasonable



It appears that most survey participants are comfortable with the amount of work they are assigned. The 23 percent who do not perceive their workload as reasonable may need help from their supervisors in reviewing their workload and if appropriate and possible, adjusting it. In some Federal agencies, the amount of work that needs to be done may exceed the capability of the current workforce and funds are not available to add staff. In this situation, leaders are advised to review the criticality of work tasks and determine if any can be eliminated as well as review work processes to identify how they can be streamlined. In some cases, the source of employees' perceptions that their workload is not reasonable may be that they do not have the level of competency or the tools or staff support needed to efficiently perform the work and therefore it is taking longer than necessary. Alternatively, employees may have unrealistically low expectations of how much work they should do or there may be obstacles outside their control. Supervisors need to frequently discuss with their employees their perceptions of their workload and available resources so that potential problems can be promptly explored and resolved.

Providing Feedback

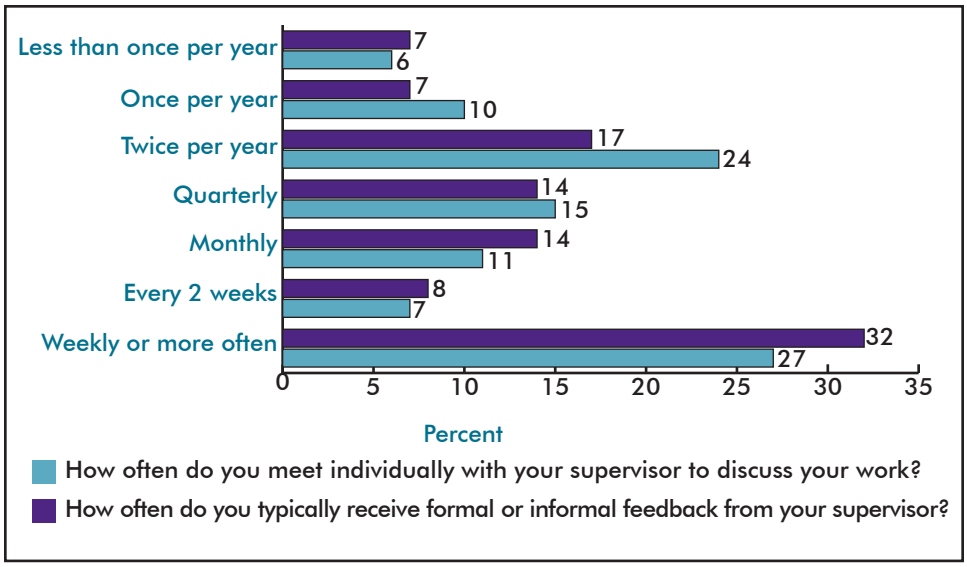
Research repeatedly shows that giving feedback to their employees is the most important and effective action supervisors can take to improve work performance. The feedback should both communicate to employees that they are valued and provide direct information about their work, especially what they are doing well and what can be improved.[17] Feedback can come from many sources other than the

[17] J. Fuller, *Performance Management with Bottom-Line Results.* Presentation at the International Quality and Productivity Center Conference, Aligning Performance Management with Business Strategy and Goals, San Francisco, August 2001.

supervisor. It can come from coworkers, higher level leaders, customers, suppliers, and external colleagues or from self-reflection or measurements. There are two kinds of feedback: positive feedback when good performance is acknowledged and complimented, and corrective feedback when errors or deficiencies are specifically identified and instructions are given for rectifying them. The Conference Board reports that in a survey of 166 organizations, poor or insufficient performance feedback was identified as a primary cause of deficient performance by 60 percent of respondents, more than any other factor.[18]

Many employees are not benefiting from frequent performance feedback from their supervisors. We asked employees two closely related questions: "How often do you typically receive formal or informal feedback from your supervisor?" and "How often do you meet individually with your supervisor to discuss the progress of your work?" **Figure 15** illustrates their responses.

Figure 15: Frequency of Performance Feedback and Meetings with Supervisor



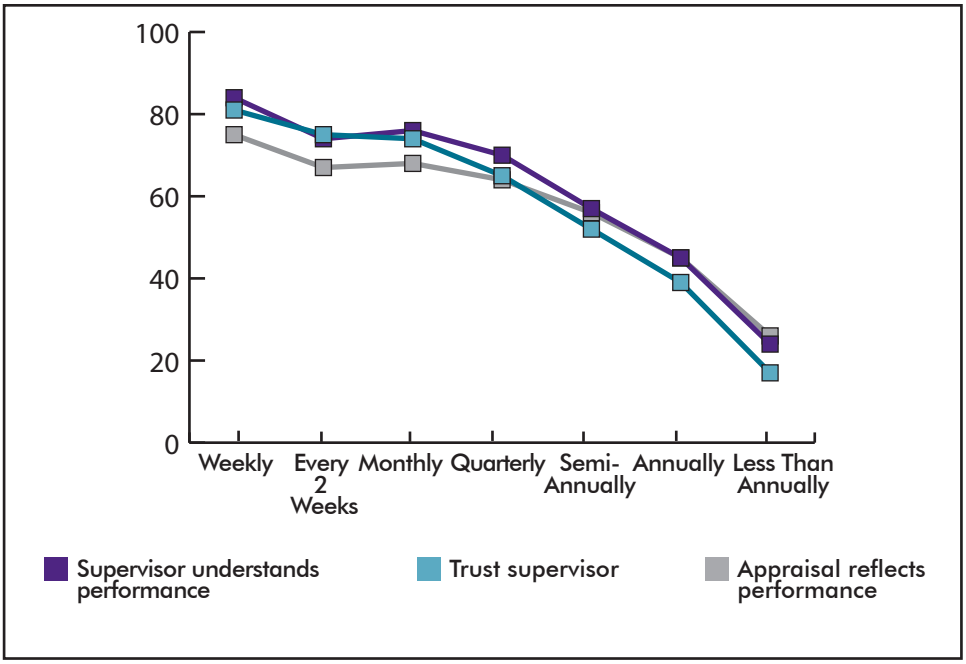
The similarity of the responses to both questions leads us to conclude that most of the feedback given to employees by supervisors is probably provided during individual progress review meetings rather than informally. The supervisors of the 40 percent of employees who receive feedback at least every two weeks are to be commended, but it is clear that many other employees are not benefiting from frequent feedback or reviews and discussion of their work. More than half (60 percent) of employees are receiving feedback monthly or less often. Especially distressing are the 31 percent of employees who receive feedback only twice yearly or less often and the 40 percent who meet with their supervisor to discuss their work just twice yearly or even less frequently.

[18] The next three highest causes of deficient performance were high individual stress levels (40 percent), lack of performance standards (39 percent), and lack of clear individual goals (37 percent). The Conference Board, *Closing The Human Performance Gap*, Washington, DC, August 1994. Note: The Conference Board is a non-profit, independent membership organization that creates and disseminates knowledge about organizational management.

When we look at responses to these questions by the participants' supervisory status, we see that supervisors are receiving more feedback and attention from their managers than they give to their employees. Thirty-eight percent of individual workers reported that they receive feedback at least every two weeks compared with 45 percent of team leaders, 48 percent of supervisors and managers, and 55 percent of executives. Thirty-eight percent of individual workers meet at least every two weeks with their supervisors, compared with 42 percent of team leaders, 47 percent of supervisors, and 50 percent of managers and executives.

Infrequent supervisor-employee meetings erode trust and confidence. Individual supervisor-employee meetings to discuss the employee's progress are an effective and practical approach to providing regular feedback and developing good working relationships. For employees who work at different locations from their supervisors, the meetings can be telephonic. The important thing is that employees and their supervisors both regularly monitor and discuss the employee's progress. The value of frequent individual progress meetings is demonstrated in **Figure 16**. It depicts the strong relationship of the frequency of supervisor-employee meetings with employees' trust in their supervisors, their confidence that their supervisor has a good understanding of their job performance and accomplishments, and their confidence that their performance appraisals are a fair reflection of their performance. As the frequency of meetings declines, so do the levels of trust and confidence, especially when the meetings are held less than quarterly.

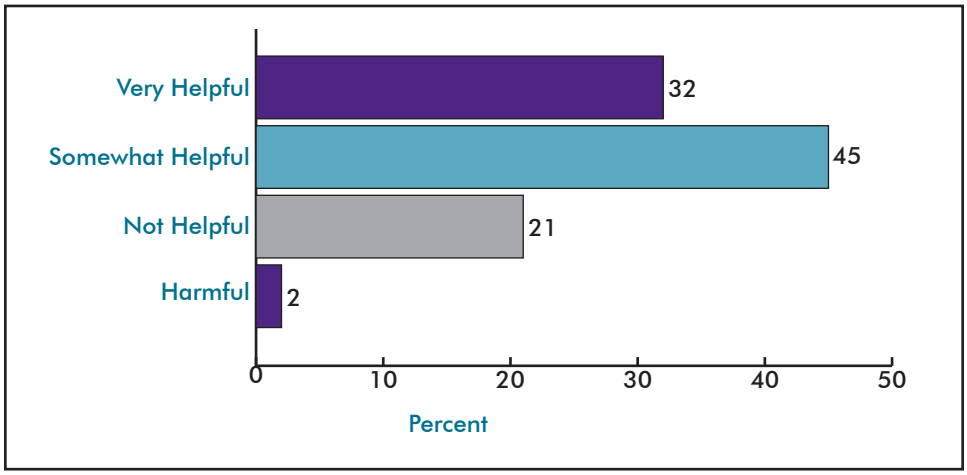
Figure 16: Relationship of Frequency of Meetings With Trust and Confidence



In the 2000 Merit Principles Survey, we also asked participants about the feedback they received from their supervisors. We did not specifically ask them how often they received feedback but rather if their supervisor kept them informed about how well they are doing, a very similar concept. About 46 percent of participants agreed with the statement, "My supervisor keeps me informed about how well I am doing." In the 2005 Merit Principles Survey, we asked participants if their supervisor provides timely feedback. About half (53 percent) agreed with the statement, "My supervisor provides timely feedback on my job performance." Although these questions from previous MPS administrations cannot be directly compared with the 2007 question about feedback frequency, we can conclude that many supervisors have not been providing adequate feedback from their employees' point of view over the last several years and there has not been recent improvement.

Most employees find their supervisors' feedback to be helpful. We asked survey participants to tell us how helpful their supervisor's feedback is in enabling them to improve or enhance their performance. **Figure 17** depicts their responses.

Figure 17: How helpful is your supervisor's feedback in helping you improve or enhance your performance?



Although the majority of participants (77 percent) find their supervisor's feedback to be very or somewhat helpful, 21 percent find their supervisors' feedback to not be helpful and 2 percent even find it to be harmful. It is possible that some employees rated their supervisor's feedback as only "somewhat helpful" or "not helpful" because they do not agree with the supervisor's assessment of their work, the supervisor may not be fully informed about the employee's work and associated constraints, or the supervisor may not be phrasing the feedback constructively. Actions can be taken to address each of these issues. Supervisors can learn how to provide sensitive, informed feedback and tailor it to the individual. Employees can learn how to accept and respond to feedback they may not want to hear.

New supervisors are not adequately prepared to provide feedback. Two reasons that leaders may not provide adequate feedback to their employees is that they don't know how to provide feedback or are uncomfortable doing so. It appears that this may be the case for many Federal leaders. Only 25 percent of supervisors, managers,

and executives said they had received formal training in providing positive feedback and coaching prior to or during their first year as a supervisor. Just 24 percent said they had received training in providing corrective feedback and coaching. Additionally, only 23 percent said they had received training in conducting performance discussions. Yet, supervisors are expected to provide feedback to their employees as an important component of their job beginning from their first day.

Supervisors' assumptions about the capability of employees to improve their performance can be a key factor in supervisors' ability to recognize changes in performance and their inclination to provide feedback and coaching. Those who believe that individual competencies and attributes are traits that are fixed over time may fail to recognize when an employee's performance is improving or declining, while those who believe people can change over time are more likely to recognize both positive and negative changes and discuss the changes with the employee. Research demonstrates that the fixed trait mindset can be changed through training interventions.[19] Thus, it may be possible to improve both the quantity and quality of feedback supervisors provide their employees if they are provided with effective training.

We also asked supervisors if they had received coaching and/or feedback from their own managers to help them build their supervisory skills during their first year as a supervisor. Fifty-nine percent said they had. The problem is thus compounded. Not only are the majority of our new supervisors not receiving formal training in giving feedback, 41 percent are not receiving feedback from their own managers. Novice supervisors often use their managers as exemplars to develop their own supervisory style. A manager's failure to provide feedback to the supervisor can communicate a strong message that giving feedback is not important or valued and can result in a cycle of inadequate feedback.

Summary

Results are mixed for the employee engagement driver of the opportunity to perform well at work. Most employees feel their talents are used well at work and the majority have written performance goals that define expected results. The majority of employees indicate that they usually have adequate resources, time, and assistance. However, a large number of employees reported that they usually do not receive the direction and guidance they need. In addition, the frequency and usefulness of feedback is not sufficient to help these employees achieve optimal performance. Engagement can be enhanced through a continuing dialogue between supervisors and employees with the shared objective of optimizing performance. High priority needs are to provide leaders at all levels with opportunities to build skill in providing top quality feedback customized to the individual and to help employees learn how to request, receive, and apply feedback.

[19] P. A. Heslin and D. VandeWalle, Managers' implicit assumptions about personnel, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17(3), 2008, pp. 219-223.

Engagement Driver Four: Positive Work Environment

The fourth driver of engagement is a positive work environment, a social and psychological context for work that communicates to employees that they are valued partners in the achievement of the agency mission. Organizational communications, leadership behaviors, policies, practices, and systems (e.g., staffing and performance management) create and reinforce the intangible work environment. Organizational leaders need to create an environment in which high performance is valued and rewarded and employees are involved and empowered to achieve their best. Leaders need to define organizational goals and the strategies to achieve the goals, determine which employee behaviors will lead to execution of the strategies, and then develop a culture in which employees choose to practice the behaviors that lead to goal achievement. When leaders actively work with employees to develop a work environment that leads to results, they are also facilitating employee commitment and engagement. If employees are involved in creating the environment, they are much more likely to support it.

Work Environment

Employees report a positive, collaborative work environment. Eighty-one percent of survey participants reported that their supervisors treat them with courtesy and respect. This basic courtesy is, of course, a prerequisite for smooth interactions between employees and their supervisors and therefore essential for good performance. Collaboration is another indicator of a positive work environment. Three-quarters of our survey participants agreed that the people they work with cooperate to get the job done.

Employee Empowerment and Involvement

Employees need to be proactively informed of work changes. Empowerment requires information. One type of information employees need to perform efficiently is to be advised, whenever possible, of work changes before they take place. If assignments, priorities, due dates, personnel, equipment, or other aspects of work are expected to change, supervisors need to inform employees of the change in advance. When supervisors explain to their employees why changes to work processes or products are being made before the changes are implemented, employees feel respected and are prepared to proactively adapt their work behaviors

to the new requirements. When changes are not explained in advance, employees feel devalued and may openly resist the changes, passively resist by being slow to adjust to the new practices, or even sabotage the changes.

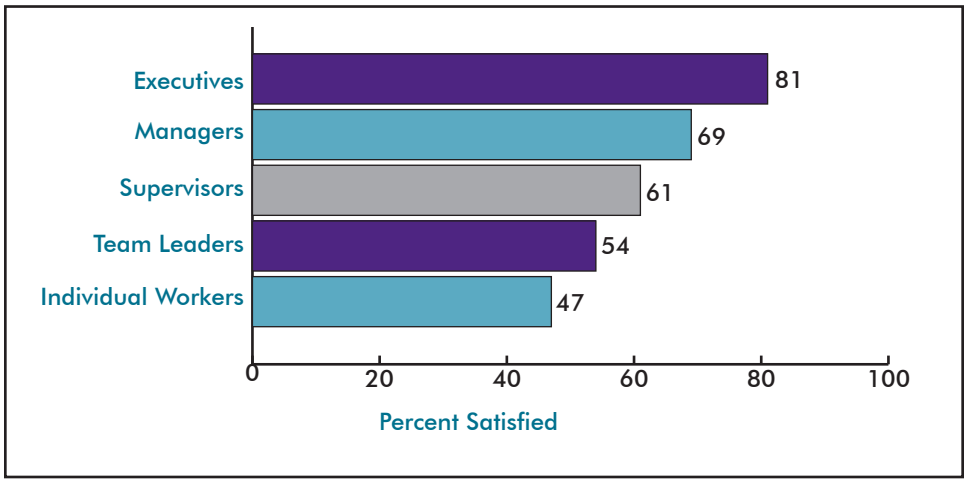
When we asked individual workers and team leaders if their supervisors explain the reasons for work changes before they take place, only 56 percent indicated they did so. Thus, many employees are not benefiting from advance explanations of work changes and therefore are not receiving information conducive to high performance. When we compared nonsupervisory employees in high and low engagement agencies, we found that 62 percent of those in high engagement agencies reported that their supervisor proactively explains changes, compared with 52 percent in low engagement agencies.

Among supervisors, managers, and executives in all agencies, 64 percent indicated that their managers explain the reasons for upcoming changes. The finding that more than one-third of leaders are not receiving advance explanations of changes from their own managers helps explain why many employees are saying changes are not explained to them before they occur. If their supervisors don't know the rationale behind changes, they cannot explain them to employees. The results of this question underscore employees' stated need for more information about the organization from their leaders that was discussed previously.

Employees want to be more involved in their organizations. Just over half (51 percent) of our survey participants are satisfied with their involvement in decisions that affect their work. When employees are not involved in work decisions that directly affect them, they often feel powerless and commitment to their work may decrease. They may also feel that their ideas are not respected or valued. Additionally, by not involving employees in these decisions, leaders are not taking advantage of employees' knowledge. Employees are typically closer to the work than leaders are and can offer valuable perspectives and insights. Agency leaders should plan how they can encourage and use input from employees when changes are being considered. They also should explain the rationale for the decisions made so that employees understand management's thinking.

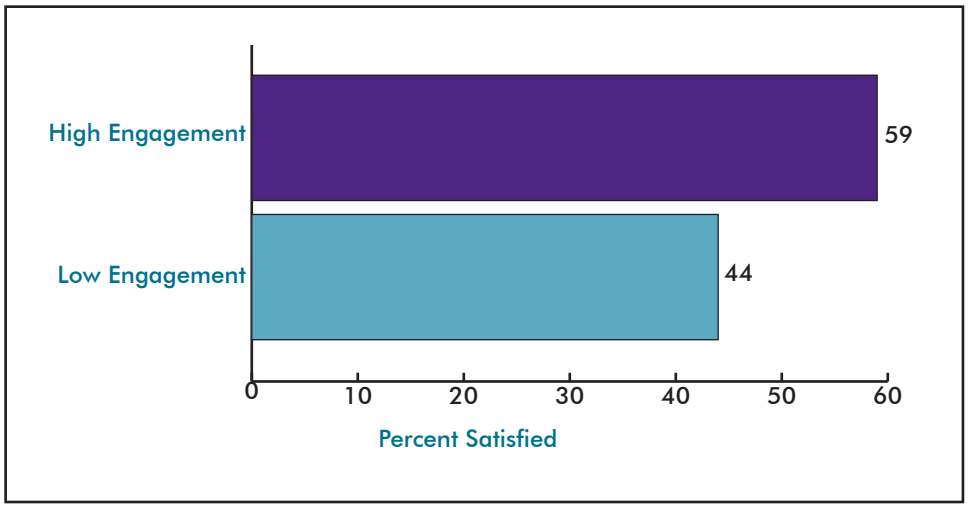
There were very large differences by supervisory status in satisfaction with involvement in decisions that affect one's work. Satisfaction steadily increases with level as shown in **Figure 18**. We would expect that leaders would be more involved in decisions that affect their work but we would also suggest that agencies consider how they can involve employees in decision making.

Figure 18: Satisfaction With Involvement in Decisions Affecting One's Work



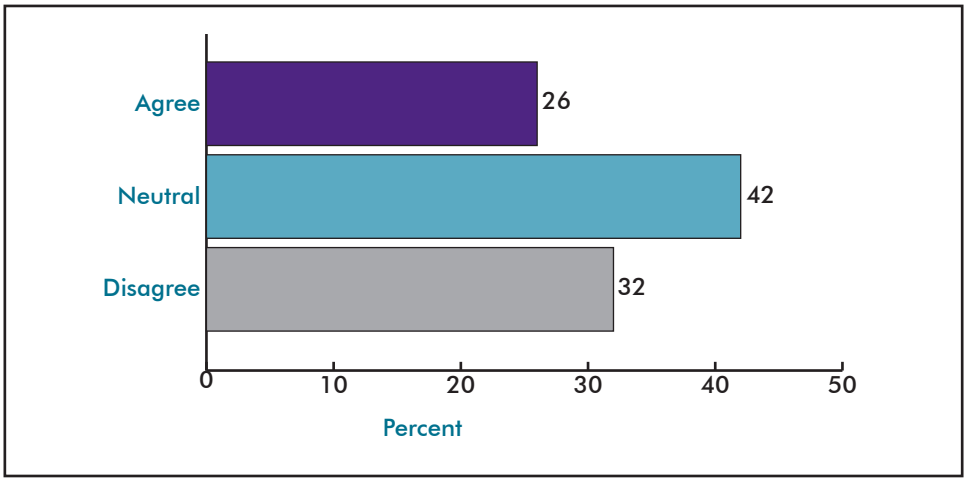
We discovered a large difference between high and low engagement agencies in nonsupervisory employees' satisfaction with their involvement in decisions that affect their work. **Figure 19** shows that 15 percent more of the employees in the four agencies with the highest percentage of engaged employees are satisfied with their involvement than employees in the four agencies with the lowest percentage of engaged employees.

Figure 19: Nonsupervisory Employees Satisfied With Involvement in High and Low Engagement Agencies



Even when employees' perspectives are solicited by their organizations, their input is frequently not being recognized or applied. As shown in **Figure 20**, only 26 percent of our survey participants who are individual workers or team leaders agreed that employee input from surveys or other means is used to make improvements in the organization. The remaining 74 percent either had no opinion or disagreed.

Figure 20: Nonsupervisory Employees – The information collected in surveys and other forms of employee input is used to make improvements in my organization



The percentage of agreement that employee input is used is higher among leaders (35 percent) but still low, especially given that leaders are the people who should be using the feedback to make improvements. When the information collected from employees in surveys and other forms of input is taken seriously by agency leaders and is actually used to make improvements, the leaders are sending two strong messages to employees: first, employee input is valued; and second, employees are partners in continuously improving the organization. Providing input and having their ideas used is important to most people and can be a powerful driver of engagement. It is possible that employee input is being used but organizational leaders are not informing employees how their input is being applied. Employees may see this lack of acknowledgement as an indication that their opinions are not valued. Thanking employees for their input and explaining to them how it is being used are essential to ensure continued employee participation in surveys and other feedback vehicles and, most importantly, to facilitate a sense of empowerment and thus engagement.

The results of previous Merit Principles Surveys demonstrate that Federal employees' sense of disempowerment has been an issue of long standing. In 2005, only 54 percent of employees reported that their opinions count at work, the same percentage as in 1996.[20] If employee input is not used, employees conclude their ideas are not valued and leadership is not concerned with their perspectives. In addition, if survey data are not properly used, taxpayers are not recouping their investment in employee surveys through improved productivity. The currently required annual employee surveys may not allow the time agencies need to plan and implement changes based on the data and then see alterations in employees' opinions as a result of the changes. It may easily take several years for program or practice changes to have a positive impact on employees' perceptions. Thus,

[20] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *The Federal Government: A Model Employer or a Work in Progress?*, Washington, DC, 2008.

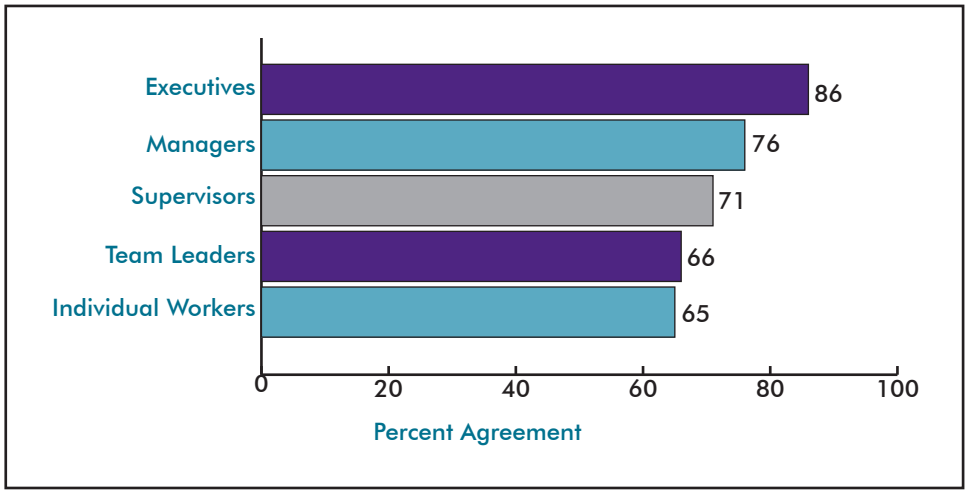
surveys are best used to identify areas for improvement and areas of success by tracking trends over time. Random variability in year-by-year results may provide misleading information if the longer term perspective is not also considered. In addition, many agencies do not have the resources to dedicate to survey analysis and responsive action on a yearly basis. Employee surveys are costly endeavors in terms of development, administration, employee time, analysis, interpretation, and application of the results.

Surveys are a good investment if they result in improved performance and productivity. However, it may be difficult for agencies to make effective use of the information obtained in annual surveys both because changes in survey results over one year's time are difficult to accurately interpret and because it may be impractical to expect agencies with limited budgets to invest a large amount of resources every year in using the data they collect. In addition, the administration of annual surveys may set unrealistic employee expectations for rapid change; employees expect to see results from their input which often cannot be delivered in complex organizations within a short time frame. In sum, the annual surveys may promise more than they can deliver to employees, agencies, and the public. Employee surveys administered every two or three years may be a more practical alternative.

High Performance Culture

Increased communication of high performance expectations to all employees would be beneficial. We asked survey participants if their supervisor communicates high performance expectations to employees. Two-thirds of all participants stated that they did. This is a promising beginning but a substantial minority of employees are not benefiting from the stimulus of expectations that they should perform at their best. Moreover, when we view the data by supervisory status as shown in **Figure 21**, we see that high performance expectations are being communicated to leaders more frequently than to nonsupervisory employees. Thus, some leaders may not be transmitting the messages they receive from their managers. Leaders achieve results through their employees. If leaders do not communicate the same high level of expectations they receive to their employees, it will be difficult for leaders to achieve their goals.

Figure 21: Supervisors Communicate High Performance Expectations



We also found that 10 percent more of the survey participants in the high engagement agencies than in the low engagement agencies reported that their supervisors communicate high performance expectations.

More supervisors need to invest effort in maintaining and improving their work unit's performance. Sixty-three percent of survey participants agree that their supervisors work hard to maintain and improve their work unit's performance. This is a moderately positive result but more emphasis on improving work group performance would very likely lead to increased effectiveness. When supervisors focus on continuous improvement, not only does it result in better performance, but the supervisors serve as role models for their employees and thus encourage them to work on improving their individual performance.

Management of Poor Performers

The ineffective management of poor performers remains a problem. Federal employees have reported for years that their supervisors do not manage poor performers well. In the 1996 MPS, employees' strongest negative perception concerned the handling of poor performers. Forty-four percent of nonsupervisory employees and 43 percent of supervisory employees reported that their agencies had a major problem in taking appropriate steps to correct inadequate performance.[21] Only 22 percent of the MPS 2000 participants reported that their supervisor dealt effectively with poor performers, while 30 percent of respondents to the MPS 2005 did so.[22] In the 2007 MPS we again found only 30 percent of survey participants

[21] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Adherence to the Merit Principles in the Workplace: Federal Employees' View*, Washington, DC, 1997.

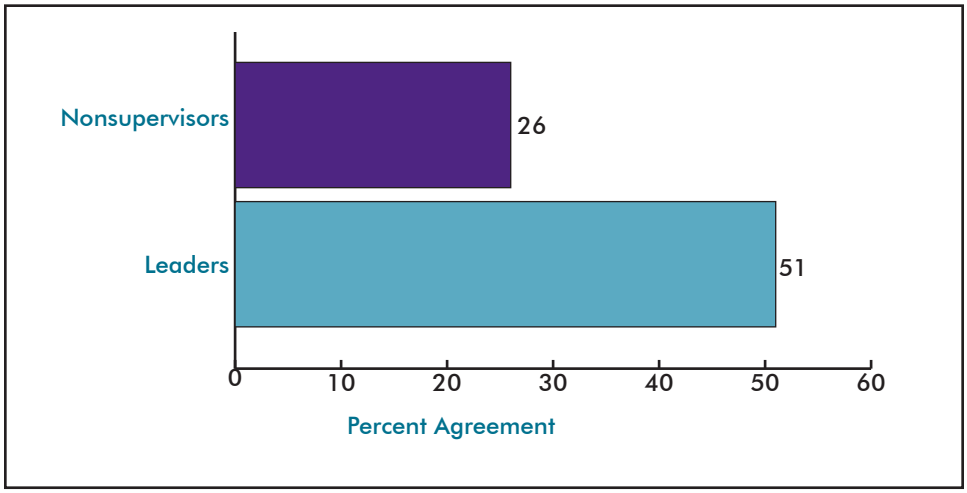
[22] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *The Federal Government: A Model Employer or a Work in Progress?*, Washington, DC, 2008.

agreeing that steps are taken to deal with poor performers who cannot or will not improve. We also found that employees' perception of the management of poor performers is consistently negative across all agencies. When we viewed the results by agency, levels of agreement that steps were taken to manage poor performers varied from a high of only 37 percent to a low of 21 percent.

The high engagement agencies seem to be doing a somewhat better job of managing poor performers than other agencies at least from the perspective of employees. Thirty-five percent of nonsupervisory employees in high engagement agencies agreed that steps are taken to deal with poor performers. Only 24 percent of their peers in low engagement agencies agreed.

As **Figure 22** illustrates, there is a profound difference between the perceptions of nonsupervisory employees and leaders in all agencies on this issue. While only 26 percent of nonsupervisory employees believe that steps are taken to deal with poor performers, almost twice that percentage of leaders feel actions are taken.

Figure 22: In my work unit, steps are taken to deal with a poor performer who cannot or will not improve



One reason for the chasm between nonsupervisors and leaders' perceptions may be that employees are not informed of the actions supervisors take to deal with poor performers because counseling poor performers is a private matter between the employee and the supervisor. In addition, employees often are not fully informed about their coworkers' performance and may reach inaccurate conclusions. However, if a co-worker performs poorly for an extended time and remains in the work unit, employees may reasonably conclude that the supervisor is not effectively dealing with the problem. Another possible explanation is that supervisors are sometimes unaware of performance problems or underestimate their severity. Coworkers often recognize a problem long before the supervisor when the supervisor does not frequently review employees' work. It is also possible that leaders are reluctant to admit that they and their peers are not taking the actions needed to manage poor performers.

The Office of Personnel Management has estimated that that the percentage of poor performers in the Federal Government is about 3.7 percent[23] so the number of poor performers is not as serious a problem as the way they are managed. Analysis of the percentage of employees eligible for a salary step increase (Within-Grade Increase or WGI) in 2006 provides an independent source of data that corroborates employees' perceptions that poor performers are not being well managed. Of the approximately 481,000 employees eligible for a WGI, 99.9 percent received one.[24] The WGI's are intended to be performance-based, i.e., employees should only receive the step increase if they are fully meeting performance expectations. It is extremely unlikely that only one-tenth of one percent of Federal employees (or employees in any organization) are performing below expectations. Even if we assume that some supervisors are directly initiating performance-based actions such as reductions in grade or removals for poor performance rather than denying WGI's, it is highly probable that some supervisors are awarding WGI's to poor performers who do not deserve them. Additional evidence for the ineffective management of poor performers is the distribution of performance ratings. Less than 1 percent of employees received ratings below the fully successful level.[25] If we assume that OPM's estimate that the percentage of poor performers is about 3.7 percent is accurate, both the salary step increases and the lenient ratings provide solid evidence that supervisors are not effectively managing poor performers.

When poor performers are not well managed or employees believe they are not well managed, there is a strong negative influence on the engagement of the employees in the work unit. Supervisors' failure to deal effectively with poor performers sends a clear message to all employees that good performance is optional and low effort is acceptable. The expectation of continual improvement on everyone's part is dashed and a high performance culture is undermined. Although the percentage of poor performers may be low, their negative impact on their coworkers can be high. Not only do poor performers lower the work unit's productivity, they may generate resentment and frustration among the employees who are working hard. This is especially a problem in the Federal sector where most employees are not paid on the basis of the quality or quantity of their performance so that poor performers may receive the same compensation they would if they were performing well. Perceived unfairness in pay has long been known to be a powerful de-motivator.[26]

Additionally, the work not completed by poor performers may be distributed to their coworkers, a practice that can easily generate additional resentment. When we asked our survey participants how often they do more than their fair share of work because of the poor performance or low productivity of their coworkers, 63 percent responded that they routinely do more than their fair share of work

[23] U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Poor Performers in the Government: A Quest for the True Story,* Washington, DC, January 1999.

[24] The 481,000 employees are the full-time, permanent Executive Branch employees in the General Schedule and GM pay plans included in the Central Personnel Data File, September 2006, who were eligible for a salary step increase.

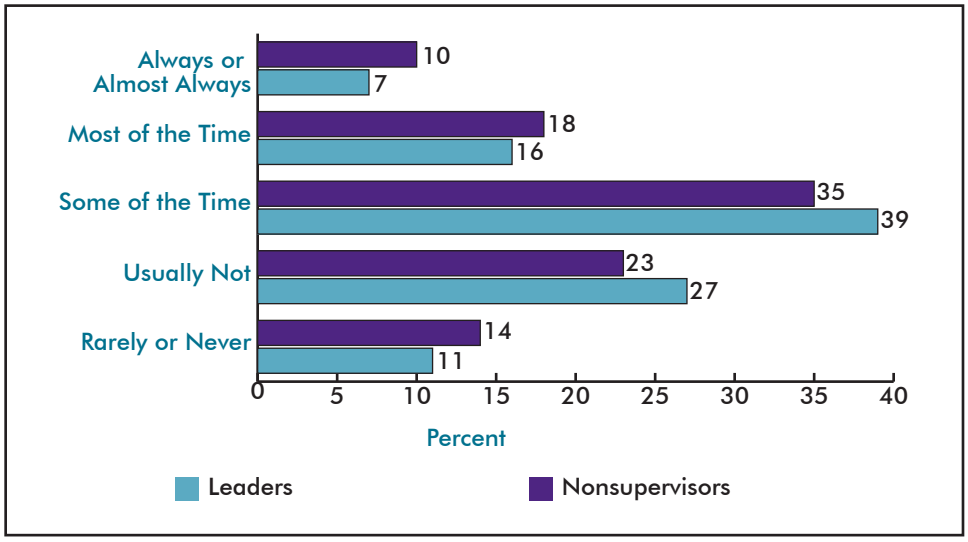
[25] This finding is explained in the section on performance appraisal in the next chapter.

[26] F. Herzberg, *Work and the Nature of Man*, World Publishing, Cleveland, 1966.

because of poorly performing coworkers (35 percent said they do this work some of the time, 18 percent said most of the time, and 10 percent said always or almost always). Only 24 percent said they usually do not have to do others' work and 13 percent said they rarely or never do extra work because of poor performers. Thus, the majority of employees believe that they are unfairly asked to take on work not completed by poor performers.

Although nonsupervisors and leaders differ significantly in their opinions of how well poor performers are managed, almost the same percentage believe that at least some of the time they do more than their fair share of work because of the poor performance of others (63 percent of nonsupervisors and 62 percent of leaders). **Figure 23** shows how closely the perceptions of leaders and nonsupervisors align on this question and emphasizes the seriousness of the consequences of not dealing well with poor performers.

Figure 23: How often do you do more than your fair share of work because of the poor performance or low productivity of one or more of your coworkers?



The results of this question lead us to believe that rather than actively helping poor performers improve or removing them, some supervisors are apparently dealing with the problem of poor performers by transferring their work to others. Situations in which an extra burden is placed on good workers because their supervisors are not managing poor performers well lowers employees' engagement in their work and leads to overall declines in work unit productivity.

Insufficient supervisor training is a key contributor to the ineffective management of poor performers. One major reason that poor performers are not being well managed is that many new supervisors are not being taught how to work

with poor performers. Below are the percentages of leaders who reported that prior to or during their first year as a supervisor they received formal training in the skills needed to manage poor performers:

- Using the probationary period as the final stage of the selection process—9 percent
- Helping all employees improve their performance—20 percent
- Managing poor performers—21 percent
- Conducting performance discussions—23 percent
- Providing corrective feedback and coaching—24 percent
- Monitoring or reviewing employee work and progress—26 percent
- Documenting employee performance—28 percent

With so few new supervisors receiving training in these critical areas, it is not surprising that there are problems in effectively managing poor performers. Formal training is not the only way to learn how to manage employees but agencies need to provide at least a foundation of basic training to their new supervisors to ensure consistency in the handling of performance problems. For example, new supervisors need to learn both that they can withhold within-grade salary step increases from poorly performing employees and the process for doing so. Especially noteworthy is that only about one-fifth of new supervisors were trained in helping employees improve their performance or managing poor performers and, worse yet, only 9 percent learned how to use the probationary period to separate poor performers.

Better use of the probationary period can help correct the problem. The probationary period is a vital tool in identifying low performers early and removing them easily from the workforce if they do not improve. In our 2005 study, *The Probationary Period: A Critical Assessment Opportunity*, we determined that the probationary period is not being used as intended to determine if a probationer's performance warrants a final appointment. We also found that if problems are not addressed during the probationary period, the employee is extremely unlikely to leave thereafter.[27] Inadequate use of the probationary period as the final step in the selection process is very likely a primary contributor to the persistent problem of ineffective management of poor performers.

Other factors contribute to problems in managing poor performers. In addition to lack of training and not taking advantage of the probationary period to dismiss poor performers, there are many other factors that may lead supervisors not to take

[27] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, T*he Probationary Period: A Critical Assessment Opportunity*. Washington, DC, 2005.

steps to effectively manage poor performers. For example, the special job protections Federal employees enjoy may discourage some supervisors from addressing poor performance. Of course, these protections are not intended as shelters for employees who are not performing well, but some supervisors see them as restricting their ability to deal with poor performers. If supervisors regularly review and document their employees' work and meet with them to discuss their performance, which are both necessary for accountability for all employees, the supervisors will be well equipped to take needed actions in managing poor performers. Employee protections only become an obstacle to taking justified actions when supervisors delay in addressing performance problems and do not document both the employee's performance and the supervisor's efforts to guide and assist the employee.

Additional factors that may contribute to the ineffective management of poor performers include supervisors' discomfort with providing corrective feedback to employees, a perceived or real lack of support from management, the long process and extensive documentation that some agencies may be requiring to take disciplinary action against an employee, the supervisor's fear of having to respond if the employee grieves or appeals the action, and the inability to replace a separated employee. In addition, supervisors' beliefs about the malleability of human behavior affects their efforts to help employees improve. Those who believe that human attributes cannot be changed are less likely to invest effort in helping poor performers improve.[28]

Summary

Our survey results indicate that Federal agencies are doing well in some aspects of cultivating a positive work environment but improvement is needed in several other areas. Employees report that they are treated with courtesy and respect and that their coworkers are collaborative. Supervisors are doing a moderately good job of establishing high performance expectations and investing effort in improving their work units. Employee empowerment could be increased by proactively informing employees of the reasons for workplace changes, using the input they offer to improve the organization, and involving them in decisions that affect their work. The issue of ineffective management of poor performers persists. Unfortunately, some leaders appear to be addressing the problem of poor performers by distributing their work to others. Low empowerment and the frustration engendered by not resolving performance problems can undermine employees' engagement in their work.

[28] P.A. Heslin and D. VandeWalle, Managers' implicit assumptions about personnel, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17(3), 2008, pp. 219-223.

Engagement Driver Five: Satisfaction With The Recognition Received

The fifth driver of employee engagement is satisfaction with the recognition received for one's contributions. Recognition encompasses all the ways organizations provide positive consequences for good performance, from simple words of gratitude to monetary awards and public ceremonies. Recognition lets employees know their work is appreciated and valued. It is a strong contributor to high levels of employee engagement and retention. As well as encouraging employees to repeat desirable behaviors, recognition can be used to improve an employee's performance to the level expected by recognizing incremental improvements. Monetary incentives such as salary increases and bonuses are only part of the recognition picture. In addition to money, employees appreciate more personal forms of acknowledgement of their contributions, such as oral or written praise, achievement awards, time off, special assignments, increased autonomy, opportunities to share and implement their ideas, and public recognition.

Careful consideration of the behaviors or outcomes that should be rewarded is important when planning how to reward employees. Reward programs can result in nonproductive behavior if potential unintended negative consequences are not considered. For example, some organizations have discovered that if managers' bonuses are based on low error rates, it is essential to develop mechanisms that will assure accurate identification and attribution of errors. In another common example, when quantity of output is rewarded, quality can suffer unless steps are taken to ensure quality.

To be effective, recognition needs to be tied to specific performance results and be given only to employees who truly have earned it; i.e., those who have clearly met the criteria for the award. For example, if all employees in a work unit receive the same or similar performance ratings or awards regardless of their contributions, the rating or award is no longer an acknowledgement of special achievement and will not be effective in engaging employees. It is also important to remember that not all forms of recognition improve performance. For example, when recognition is perceived as controlling rather than supportive, it may reduce intrinsic motivation and therefore performance, as when compliance is rewarded and innovation is not. Also, recognition may provide an incentive for continued good performance to the employees who receive it but have a negative effect on employees who feel they deserve the same type of recognition but do not receive it.[29] Consistency, fairness, and intensive communication about the purpose and distribution of rewards are essential.

[29] B. Frey, Giving and receiving awards, *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(4), 2006, pp. 377-388.

Accountability

Recognition of good work is based on accountability. A basic principle of human behavior is that people will repeat behavior that results in positive consequences and they will avoid behavior that results in negative consequences. Accountability in the workplace is holding people responsible for their work by applying appropriate consequences for their performance—positive consequences for good performance and negative consequences for inadequate performance. Positive consequences are events that are perceived as good by the employee. Examples are a coveted assignment, words of appreciation, or a salary increase. Negative consequences are events that are viewed as adverse by the employee. Examples are a low performance rating, the removal of responsibility, or no salary increase.

When there are no external consequences for performance, the employee may perceive the situation as either positive or negative depending on the circumstances and the employee's proclivities. For example, if an employee successfully completes a challenging assignment that required much effort and time and receives no feedback from his supervisor, he is likely to perceive the lack of acknowledgement as negative. If an employee does not complete an assigned task and does not receive corrective feedback from her supervisor, she is likely to perceive the lack of response as positive. Thus, from the employee's point of view, there are always consequences for performance, intended or not by the supervisor.

Holding Employees Accountable for Results Needs to be Strengthened. It is important to distinguish between activities and results. Employees should be accountable for outcomes, not for activities. We asked survey participants if they are held accountable for achieving results in the sense that if they achieve expected work results, they experience positive consequences. About 65 percent agreed they are held accountable. The percentage of agreement varied across agencies from 53 to 93 percent. We can infer that agencies employ divergent policies and practices in holding their employees accountable for good work. It is notable that 71 percent of the employees in the high engagement agencies reported experiencing positive consequences for good work results, compared with 59 percent of employees in the low engagement agencies.

We also asked survey participants if they are held accountable for results in the sense that if they do not achieve the expected work results, they experience negative consequences. About 57 percent of survey participants agreed that they experience negative consequences when they do not achieve expected work results. The difference in level of agreement between low and high engagement agencies was less than for positive accountability; 61 percent for high engagement agencies and 57 percent for low engagement agencies. Again, we saw substantial variations across the agencies with a range of 46 to 93 percent agreement. For all but four agencies, the percentage of employees who agreed that they are held accountable by experiencing positive consequences is higher, and in most cases, substantially higher, than the percentage who say they are held accountable by experiencing negative consequences.

In discussing negative consequences for not achieving expected work results, it is important to differentiate failure to achieve ambitious "stretch" goals from failure to achieve more easily attainable outcomes. In some cases, it may not be possible to accomplish a bold goal because of circumstances beyond the employee's control and employees should not be punished for undertaking ambitious projects and prudent risks. The point is that employees need to be held accountable for fully contributing to their organizations and investing their best efforts to accomplish their goals.

Based on the data from these two questions about accountability, we conclude that more effort should be invested in holding Federal employees accountable for results. Accountability for one's work is the most fundamental principle of performance management and is essential for ensuring high performance. Some workplace practices are helpful in improving performance but are not critical. Accountability is absolutely vital. Leaders must clearly communicate to all employees that they are held accountable for their work and will experience positive consequences for good work and negative consequences for poor work. Employees will only believe this if it actually happens. Holding employees accountable for their work is more challenging in the Federal workplace than it is for the other employment sectors given the protections afforded to Federal employees and the loose link between pay and performance for most. In the conclusion of this chapter, we discuss several of the factors that make accountability more difficult for Federal managers to consistently implement as well as how accountability can be sustained despite these challenges.

Performance Appraisal

Employees can only be held accountable for their performance if their work is fairly assessed. Earlier in this report, we discussed the importance of performance goals as a means of clearly defining work expectations. These goals are the baseline for measuring and evaluating performance. If agencies do not have clear performance goals and measures in place for their employees, it is difficult to fairly assess performance.

The assessment of employee performance is an area of concern. As shown in Table 1, two-thirds of all nonsupervisory employees agree that their supervisor has a good understanding of their job performance and accomplishments. Fifty-six percent believe that appropriate, objective measures are used to evaluate their performance. Sixty-one percent agreed that their performance appraisal is a fair reflection of their performance, while 63 percent understood what they had to do to earn a different rating. When we view the survey results for these questions for nonsupervisory employees in the high engagement agencies, we see that they have significantly more favorable perceptions of the accuracy of their performance appraisals than their counterparts in the low engagement agencies.

Table 1. Nonsupervisors' Perceptions of Performance Appraisal—Levels of Agreement

2007 Merit Principles Survey Question	All Agencies	High Engagement Agencies	Low Engagement Agencies
My supervisor has a good understanding of my job performance and accomplishments.	66 %	71 %	63 %
Appropriate, objective measures are used to evaluate my performance.	56 %	61 %	48 %
My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance.	61 %	69 %	57 %
In my most recent performance appraisal, I understood what I had to do to be rated at different performance levels.	63 %	67 %	55 %

Across all agencies, leaders' perceptions are similar to nonsupervisors' views for all four of these questions about performance appraisal. In each question, the percentage of agreement is only 3 to 5 percent higher for leaders. These are among the few questions in the MPS 2007 in which nonsupervisors and leaders have similar opinions.

There was a wide range of agreement from 50 to 76 percent among all survey participants in all agencies that their performance appraisal is a fair reflection of their performance. This means that many Federal employees do not believe that their performance is being accurately assessed. This may be because objective measures are not being employed to evaluate performance, these measures have not been implemented well or consistently, or alternatively, the measures may have been appropriately applied but employees do not believe they received the rating they deserve. As we have seen, many supervisors are not providing employees with frequent feedback, so employees are not receiving accurate information about their performance throughout the year. For example, it is common for employees to believe they are performing better than they actually are because their supervisors are not offering corrective feedback. Employees are then unpleasantly surprised when their performance ratings are lower than expected. It is also possible that employees did receive feedback during the performance year but they disagree with their supervisors' evaluation of their performance.

The accuracy and fairness of performance appraisals is a complex issue because performance ratings may be influenced by multiple factors unrelated to performance. Examples of these factors include:

- Supervisors' ability to separate individual performance from the impact of organizational processes, systems, and events
- Supervisors' understanding of the employee's work; e.g., if a supervisor has less technical knowledge than the employee, it is difficult for the supervisor to accurately judge the employee's performance
- Supervisors' tendency to give higher performance ratings to employees they have personally hired compared to those hired by others
- The similarity of the employee to the supervisor in personal characteristics and background
- Impression management by employees, e.g., ingratiation; taking credit for others' work
- Supervisors' beliefs about the rigidity or malleability of employee competencies; e.g., supervisors who believe people can change are more apt to recognize improvements or declines in employees' performance over the rating period
- Rating distortions by supervisors; e.g., inflating the ratings of low performers in the belief it will encourage them to improve; not assigning low or moderate ratings because they believe that telling employees the truth about their performance will damage the person, the employee-supervisor relationship, or work group functioning; a personal lack of courage or fear of conflict in being able to explain and support a low rating to employees and cope with their reactions; and punishing a competent but challenging employee with a low rating.[30]

Adding to the complexity of performance ratings is the issue of how employees perceive the fairness of ratings based on their assessments of their own performance. Research consistently demonstrates that people do not accurately evaluate their own competencies or performance and that self-assessments are both substantively and systematically flawed. Employees tend to significantly overestimate the level of their performance. The one exception is top performers, who tend to accurately estimate the quality of their own performance but underestimate how well they perform compared to others.[31] Many studies show that about 80 percent of employees

[30] K. Murphy, Explaining the weak relationship between job performance and ratings of job performance, *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, 1(2), 2008, pp. 148-160.

P.A. Heslin, D. VandeWalle, and G.P. Latham, The effect of implicit person theory on performance appraisals. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 90(5), 2005, pp. 842-856.

T. Coens and M. Jenkins, *Abolishing Performance Appraisals: Why They Backfire and What To Do Instead*, Barrett-Koehler, San Francisco, 2000.

S.W. J. Kozlowski, G.T. Chao, and R.F. Morrison, Games raters play: Politics, strategies, and impression management in performance appraisal, in J.W. Smither (Ed.), *Performance Appraisal: State Of The Art In Practice, Jossey-Bass*, San Francisco, 1998, pp. 163-205.

[31] D. Dunning, C. Heath, and J. M. Suls, Flawed self-assessment: Implications for health, education, and the workplace. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest,* 5(3), 2004, pp. 69-106.

rate their performance as being in the top quarter of their work group.[32] This tendency to overestimate one's performance also exists in the Federal workforce. For example, in the MPS 2005, when we asked employees to rate their performance in comparison to their coworkers in their work unit, 69 percent rated themselves as above average, 30 percent rated themselves as average, and less than 1 percent said their performance was below average.[33]

There are several reasons why most people are poor judges of their own level of competence. One is that the knowledge, skills, or abilities needed to perform competently are the same as those needed to evaluate performance.[34] For example, if a supervisor lacks skill in providing helpful feedback to employees, this skill deficit prevents him both from providing good feedback and from recognizing that he is not supplying useful feedback. Another reason for inaccurate self-assessment is that people begin their self-evaluations by applying their preconceived beliefs about their levels of skill rather than carefully thinking through what they did well and what they did not.[35] In addition, rather than paying attention to their overall proficiency, people focus on the aspects of performance that they do well and tend not to consider their weaker points. They thus define competence in a way that puts them in the best light.[36] For example, if an employee has excellent analytical skills but poor writing skills, she will tend to focus on the analysis tasks as the truly important component of her job. Self-enhancement in domains that people care about, including their performance at work, is a fundamental psychological characteristic of human beings.[37]

In addition to people generally being poor assessors of their own performance, there is the problem of the *fundamental attribution error*, a widespread phenomenon of human behavior in which people attribute their inability to accomplish tasks not to their own behaviors but to external factors such as inadequate time, resources, or direction, while they identify their colleagues' behaviors as the cause for their colleagues' performance limitations. Attribution error leads to employees believing they did everything they could to accomplish their work goals and thus over-rating their own performance, while downplaying the performance of their colleagues.[38] They sincerely believe they are "above average" and should receive higher ratings than most of their colleagues.

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[32] T. Coens and M. Jenkins, *Abolishing Performance Appraisals: Why They Backfire And What To Do Instead*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco, 2000.

[33] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Accomplishing Our Mission: Results of the 2005 Merit Principles Survey*, Washington, DC, 2007.

[34] D. Dunning, K. Johnson, J. Ehrlinger, and J. Kruger, Why people fail to recognize their own incompetence. *Current Directions in Psychological Science,* 12(3), 2003, pp. 83-87.

[35] Ibid.

[36] W. Williams, Blissfully incompetent, *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 5(3), 2004, pp. i-ii.

[37] C. Sedikides and A. P. Gregg, Self-enhancement: Food for thought. *Perspectives on Psychological Science,* 3(2), 2008, pp. 102-116.

[38] H. J. Bernardin, C. M. Hagan, J .S. Kane, and P. Villanova, Effective performance management: A focus on precision, customers, and situational constraints, in J.W. Smithers (Ed.), *Performance Appraisal: The State Of The Art In Practice*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1998, pp. 3-48.

P. J. Dean, M. R. Dean, and R. M. Rebalsky, Employee perceptions of workplace factors that will most improve their performance, *Performance Improvement Quarterly,* 9(2),1996, pp. 75-89.

Since it is mathematically impossible for 69 percent of Federal employees to be above average and for 99 percent of them to be average or above as they evaluated themselves in the MPS 2005, we can see why appraisal fairness is a thorny issue. Employees who receive performance evaluations inconsistent with their perceptions may easily conclude that the appraisals are inaccurate and they are being treated unfairly. Federal supervisors tend to be lenient in evaluating employee performance. If they were more accurate in assigning performance ratings and actually gave people the ratings they earned, we would probably have a much higher percentage of employees who believe that appraisals do not accurately reflect their performance. The problem is compounded over time. As supervisors are consistently lenient in assigning ratings, employees come to expect high ratings and believe they deserve them. If a supervisor attempts to use performance rating scales as they are designed, so that only the truly exceptional employees receive high ratings, many employees may be offended and may file grievances. They may also complain that they will not be able to qualify for promotional opportunities in their own agencies or another agency because most other employees receive high ratings and, in comparison, they themselves will appear less qualified.

Supervisors are inadequately trained to prepare performance appraisals. The difficulty of ensuring accuracy and fairness in performance appraisals is magnified by the lack of training for Federal supervisors in preparing performance appraisals. Only 26 percent of leaders reported that, as new supervisors, they had received formal training in preparing performance appraisals. Supervisors cannot be expected to write fair and accurate appraisals if they are not taught how to do so. Writing and delivering good appraisals is a learned skill that requires both instruction and extensive practice with feedback. Formal training in preparing performance appraisals is vital because agencies need to ensure that all leaders understand and consistently implement agency requirements and guidelines for the documentation and evaluation of employee performance.

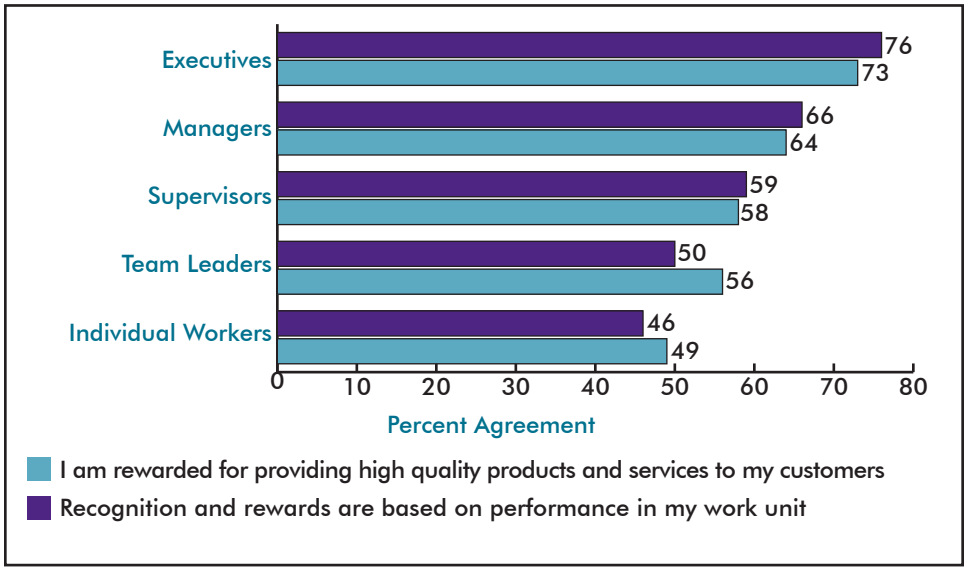
Recognition and Rewards

Only half of Federal employees believe recognition is linked to performance. According to our survey participants, most supervisors are informally acknowledging employees' good work; 70 percent reported that their supervisor compliments them when they are doing a good job. However, employees have significantly less favorable opinions of other recognition and reward practices. Only 50 percent of survey participants indicated that they are rewarded for providing high quality products and services to their customers, while 49 percent believe recognition and rewards in their work unit are based on performance. Although recent improvement is evident, the perceived lack of connection between recognition and performance has been a continuing problem in the Federal workforce and remains as one. For example, in the last 25 years, the percentages of employees who agreed that recognition and rewards

are based on performance in their work unit were 17 percent in 1983, 33 percent in 1992 and 2000, 45 percent in 2005, and 49 percent in 2007.[39]

In 2007, there were substantial disparities between nonsupervisory employees and their leaders. As shown in **Figure 24**, leaders have a more favorable view of recognition practices in their agencies.

Figure 24: Perceptions of Recognition Practices by Role



There could be several reasons why leaders, especially managers and executives, have a more favorable view of recognition practices in their agencies. First, leaders typically have more positive views overall of their organizations, because they have more influence on the policies and practices of their organization and tend to have optimistic views of the organizations they help shape. Second, they work much more closely with higher level leaders who are therefore more familiar with them and their work and thus would tend to award more recognition to managers and executives. Third, it is also possible that because they have been promoted up the hierarchy, leaders are better performers, on average, than other employees and thus actually deserve more recognition.

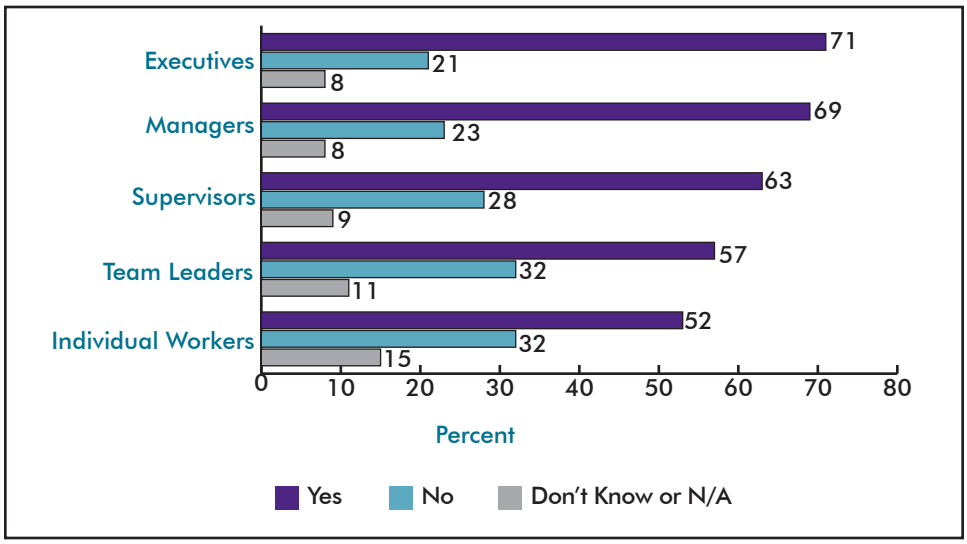
We found a difference of 14 percent between high engagement and low engagement agencies in the proportion of nonsupervisory employees who believed they are rewarded for providing high quality products and services to their customers (58 percent for high engagement agencies and 44 percent for low engagement agencies). Among all agencies, favorable perceptions ranged from a low of 35 percent to a high of 78 percent.

[39] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *The Federal Government: A Model Employer or a Work in Progress?*, Washington, DC, 2008.

In the high engagement agencies, 15 percent more employees believe recognition and rewards are based on performance in their work unit than in the low engagement agencies (57 percent for the high engagement agencies and 42 percent for the low engagement agencies). Among all agencies, favorable perceptions ranged from a low of 35 percent to a high of 69 percent. The large gaps among agencies in their employees' levels of agreement that recognition and rewards are based on performance may indicate both the diversity of the importance placed on recognition and the resources agencies invest in it.

We asked employees if they personally had been treated fairly in the past two years in the receipt of performance awards. Just over half of the survey participants, 55 percent, said they had. As in the previous questions about recognition, differences by role were substantial with leaders having a significantly more positive view as shown in **Figure 25**.

Figure 25: Have you been treated fairly in the past 2 years in awards?



It is advisable for each agency to determine why many of its employees do not believe that recognition is tied to performance and then take actions to address the problem. There are many possible reasons for employees' negative perceptions of agency recognition practices. These include:

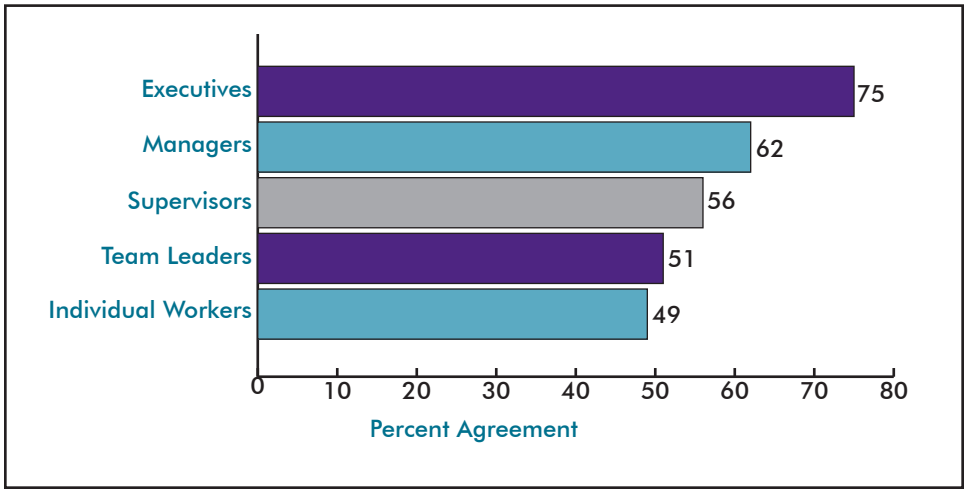
- Limited scope of recognition programs and practices
- The lack of funds for monetary recognition
- Limited availability of tangible awards in Federal personnel systems (which may make it difficult to recognize the performance of deserving employees and therefore may give rise to perceptions of inequity even when scarcity is the issue rather than fairness)
- Deficiencies in the criteria or systems used to allocate awards

- Practices that render recognition meaningless such as rewarding employees without regard to their relative contributions or rotating awards among employees
- Failure to publicize awards and recognition
- Failure to explicitly communicate to employees the links between performance and recognition
- Intentional or unintentional favoritism or bias; e.g., basing recognition more on how much the employee seems to like or admire the supervisor than on the employee's performance.

Only half of employees believe that promotions are based on merit. Promotions are an important form of recognition that an employee is doing an excellent job. We asked survey participants if they believed promotions in their work unit are based on merit. Just 51 percent of all the survey participants agreed they are. There are substantial disparities across all agencies in employees' perceptions that promotions are based on merit with agreement ranging from 44 percent to 71 percent. For example, there is a large gap between high and low engagement agencies. We found that 56 percent of nonsupervisory survey participants in high engagement agencies believe that promotions are based on merit, compared with 42 percent of participants in low engagement agencies.

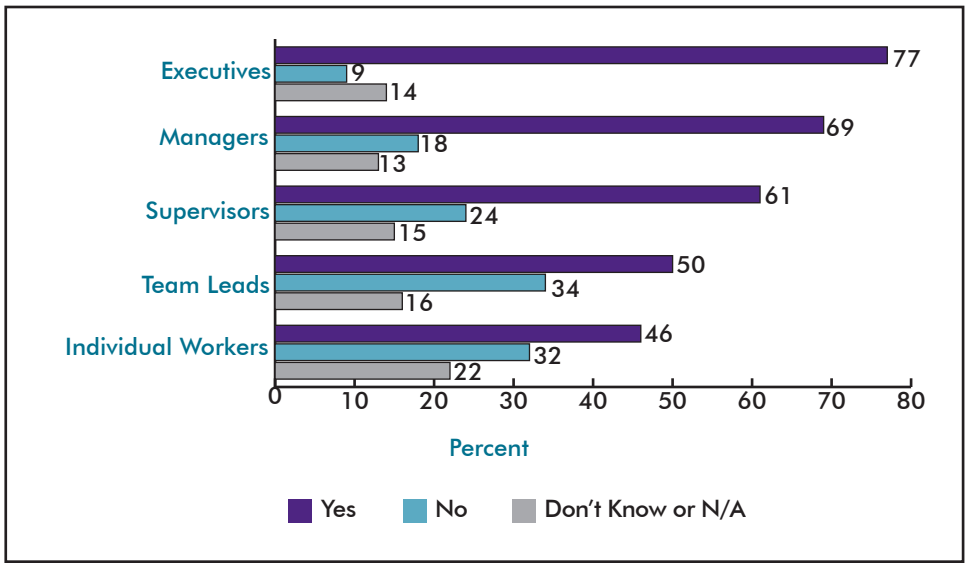
As depicted in **Figure 26**, there are also large differences in opinion between nonsupervisory employees and leaders across all agencies with executives having the most positive perceptions by far.

Figure 26: Promotions in my work unit are based on merit



We also asked survey participants if they believed that they personally had been treated fairly in the past two years in career advancement. Just under half (49 percent) believed they had been. As illustrated in **Figure 27**, there were substantial differences by role in perceptions of fairness in career advancement. For example, while only 46 percent of individual workers felt that they had been treated fairly, 77 percent of executives believed so.

Figure 27: Have you been treated fairly in the past two years in career advancement?



Figures 26 and 27 depict very similar patterns with employees' perceptions of fairness increasing with their level in the organization. As we have discussed, most people overestimate their own performance compared to others. Thus, when we ask employees if promotions are based on merit or if they have been treated fairly in career advancement, those who have been promoted are probably most likely to believe that merit and fairness are the key factors in promotions. Those who have not been promoted will believe other factors are more important in promotion decisions because they have not received the promotions they believe they deserved. It is not surprising then that perceptions of fairness and merit-based promotions increase substantially with employee level, especially among managers and executives who typically have been promoted several times to achieve their current positions.

However, in addition to potential self-assessment biases, there may be multiple factual explanations why many employees do not believe that promotions are awarded on the basis of merit. Agencies need to carefully consider and address each possibility. They include:

- Poorly conceived criteria for promotion
- Lack of transparency in criteria for promotions and the selection process
- Employees' lack of understanding of the qualifications for promotion

- Limited opportunities for employees to develop the competencies needed for advancement
- Inadequate communication of advancement opportunities
- Inadequate assessment of candidates in the selection process
- Intentional or unintentional favoritism or bias.

Each of these factors can create problems if they are not addressed. For example, some employees may not understand the qualifications required for promotion to a particular job. They are accustomed to automatic salary step increases based on length of time in a position. This system may lead them to believe that promotions should be based on seniority and if they have more experience than the person selected, they may perceive the selection as unfair. This type of misunderstanding can be avoided if leaders clearly identify the criteria for advancement.

The Challenges of Accountability and Recognition in Managing the Federal Workforce

Accountability and recognition are key challenges for managing the Federal workforce for engagement. If the linkage between work performance and recognition is perceived as weak or non-existent, employees begin to feel that the quality of their work doesn't matter to the organization and they do not invest their full energy in accomplishing their work.

Private Sector Advantages In many large private sector organizations with administrative, professional, and technical employees similar to those that currently comprise the majority of the Federal workforce, supervisors have an extensive array of techniques for holding employees at all levels accountable for achieving desired results and recognizing their contributions. Examples include salary increases tied directly to performance; large monetary bonuses; stock options; awards such as outings, dinners, travel, and gift cards; perquisites such as car service, a desirable office, or membership in a gym or country club; and special opportunities such as development or rotation programs restricted to high-potential employees. These items provide clear positive consequences for performance when they are awarded and clear negative consequences for performance when they are not. For example, an unambiguous message is sent to employees who receive large salary increases that their contributions are highly valued and they have a future in the organization. Employees who do not receive a salary increase hear the unmistakable message that they have limited time to improve before they will no longer be part of the organization.

Limitations in the Federal Sector Few of the private sector consequences and the accountability and recognition they communicate are available to most supervisors of Federal employees. There are a limited number of tools in the Federal management accountability toolbox. In addition, there are strong disincentives to using the one basic performance management tool supervisors do have to hold employees at least somewhat accountable and provide consequences for their work behaviors—accurate performance ratings. There is strong evidence that many Federal performance appraisal systems are not being used to accurately differentiate employees based on their performance. According to the records in the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Central Personnel Data File, the vast majority of employees receive high ratings despite the very low probability that this large a proportion of the workforce actually earned these ratings. For example, of the almost 12,000 participants in the MPS 2005 whose agencies employed a 5-point performance rating scale (e.g., 1 = Unacceptable, 2 = Minimally Successful, 3 = Fully Successful, 4 = Exceeds Fully Successful, 5 = Outstanding), fewer than 1 percent received ratings of 1 or 2, 14 percent received a rating of 3, 29 percent received a rating of 4, and 56 percent received a 5, the top rating. Thus, 85 percent of employees received ratings denoting superior performance. In any organization, it is extremely unlikely that this large a proportion of the workforce would perform at this high a level. It is also extremely unlikely that only 1 percent or less of the workforce would be performing below the fully successful level.

It is easy to understand why many Federal supervisors may decide it is not worthwhile to invest time and energy in accurately rating employees when it makes no difference in their salaries and only minimal differences in available bonuses, and will upset or anger many employees who believe they deserve a higher rating. If the appraisal system results in few to no tangible consequences for performance yet is likely to create problems for the supervisor in terms of employee complaints and conflicts, why conscientiously implement the system?

Even if the Federal performance appraisal system does not provide substantial consequences based on performance, the appraisal process and accompanying discussion could be useful as a communication tool to provide a vehicle for the supervisor and employee to candidly discuss what the employee is doing well and what could be improved. However, we have little assurance this is actually being done. The process only works if the supervisor, despite giving relatively high ratings, also communicates high performance expectations to employees and discusses with them how their performance can be improved.

For organizations in which pay is directly linked to performance, there is a definite need to rank and rate employees to facilitate evaluations that are as objective and fair as possible in allocating salary increases and bonus payments. However, for the majority of Federal organizations in which pay is not directly linked to performance, there is no one best approach to meet the underlying need of holding employees accountable for their work. No performance appraisal system will be effective unless it is founded on the principle of defining clear, appropriate performance goals and holding people accountable for achieving those goals.

The Need for Agency Leaders to Evaluate Performance Appraisal Each agency's leaders need to consider how the agency's current performance appraisal system helps or hinders the workforce from achieving the agency's mission and then take action to make needed changes. Several questions need to be answered, such as:

- Do our performance appraisals contribute to our efforts to hold employees accountable and recognize them for their work?
- Do our performance appraisals facilitate honest communication between supervisors and their employees?
- How are we using performance appraisals to identify employees who deserve special recognition for their work?
- Are the ratings and narratives accurate assessments of employee performance?
- Should we continue to use our current system but enforce accurate assessment?
- Do multiple-level ratings make sense in an environment where they are not used to make salary decisions? Do we need them?[40]
- Are there other, more effective ways of documenting performance and holding employees accountable?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives?
- What do our employees think about our performance appraisal system? Do they have ideas for alternative approaches?

The Bottom Line of Accountability Federal supervisors may not have the full array of tools their private sector counterparts have to hold employees accountable and performance appraisals may be operating in an environment that reduces their value as effective management tools, but Federal supervisors still have all they need for accountability and recognition if they choose to recognize and use what they have. An enormous advantage Federal supervisors have that private sector leaders do not is the opportunity to build deep levels of communication and trust with their employees. This communication and trust is possible for several reasons. Because the special job protections Federal employees enjoy allow adverse actions to be taken against them only for reasons of unacceptable conduct or performance, they do not need to fear for their jobs if they irritate or challenge a manager. They also have excellent job security; they do not feel the pressure of constantly striving to survive, and do not work in the accompanying competitive, edgy atmosphere that is common in the private sector, especially in large, high-performing companies. And very importantly, most Federal employees' salaries and salary increases are based on a set salary schedule rather than their managers' evaluation of their performance. These factors can facilitate a much more open, honest, and trusting work relationship than is usually possible in the private sector. For example, employees

[40] Under current law, most executive branch agencies are required to provide periodic ratings to employees, 5 U.S.C. § 4302(a) (1), which the Office of Personnel Management interprets to mean generally every 12 months, 5 C.F.R. § 430.206 (a) (2).

can have a candid discussion of their performance or development needs with their supervisor without undue fear that it will have a negative impact on their next salary increase. Employees can also more openly discuss their career goals, even if they involve moving to another agency or out of the Government.

What really counts in holding employees accountable and recognizing them is the personal working relationship the supervisor has with each employee. Performance appraisals and other formal systems are simply job aids; they are not in themselves sufficient. Few organizations in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors are satisfied with their performance appraisal systems. One reason is that people are expecting appraisal forms and ratings to do the work that can only be done through human interaction. In addition, most employees find the process of being graded as dehumanizing and humiliating while supervisors are uncomfortable assigning ratings. Managing performance depends on live person-to-person communication. The supervisor-employee dialogue is the bottom line of accountability. Supervisors must take an active role in consistently communicating with each employee about his or her performance. If supervisors define clear performance goals and expectations, regularly review the work of their employees, document it, and provide candid, helpful feedback and guidance, they will be better able to hold employees accountable for their work and recognize their achievements. If, for example, a supervisor meets every two weeks with employees to review their progress on assignments and provide feedback and then briefly documents the meetings, the vast majority of employees will work hard to produce results. In these meetings, the supervisor and employee can identify and work together to resolve obstacles that prevent the employee from performing at his or her best. The rare employee who does not respond to this approach and does not perform well will have an extremely difficult time claiming that he was not aware of his unacceptable performance or that the supervisor did not provide the direction or assistance needed.

Recognition The MPS results showed that only about half of Federal employees believe recognition is linked to performance. In addition, only half believe that they are rewarded for providing high quality products and services to their customers. These responses may reflect employees' frustration with the fact that compensation is not closely linked to performance, inadequate agency recognition programs, or insufficient communication of the link between performance and recognition. Because monetary forms of recognition for good performance such as substantial salary increases and bonuses are not available to most Federal employees, non-monetary recognition becomes especially important. Most employees reported that their supervisor compliments them for good work. This is a good base for supervisors to build on in devising creative ways to recognize employees that do not require funding.

Summary

A current and important challenge for many Federal supervisors is to take advantage of the unique opportunity they have to build deep levels of trust and communication with their employees to facilitate engagement and ensure accountability. They need to build stronger working relationships with their employees by interacting with them more frequently, meeting with them more often to discuss their progress, and providing frequent feedback, encouragement, and recognition.

The kind of creative, facilitative working relationship we have discussed in which supervisors hold employees accountable and recognize their contributions depends on the supervisors having excellent communication skills, a deep interest in working closely with employees to develop their potential, and a solid understanding of the role of the supervisor. For a supervisory force of this high caliber, highly effective supervisor selection, development, and performance management are required. Persons selected need existing good interpersonal and communication skills that can be strengthened through development, coaching, and feedback. It is also essential for managers and executives to hold supervisors accountable for capably managing the performance of their employees.

In addition, to build trust and respect, many higher level leaders need to communicate much more frequently and openly with employees and encourage them to express their ideas and perspectives. Open communication and commitment to high performance must begin with leadership. First-level supervisors need the full support and participation of managers and executives in engaging employees and holding them accountable for their work. When employees are engaged in their work, they will perform at high levels because they believe their work is important and because they derive personal satisfaction from it. Virtually all employees want to perform well but they need the consistent support and involvement of their direct supervisors and higher level leaders.

Engagement Driver Six: Prospect For Future Personal and Professional Growth

The prospect for future personal and professional growth through acquiring new knowledge and developing new or existing skills is the sixth and last engagement driver. Whether employees are honing their skills in their current position, preparing for new responsibilities in a lateral move, or equipping themselves for advancement, learning and growing enriches their work lives and increases engagement in their work. When an organization provides development opportunities for its employees, it communicates that employees are valued and have a future in the organization. The MPS 2007 results showed that many Federal agencies are not taking advantage of the opportunity to engage their employees through personal and professional growth.

More attention should be focused on meeting employees' training and development needs. A vital prerequisite for high performance is identifying employees' training and development needs so that competency gaps can be closed and strengths can be enhanced. No matter how experienced or competent employees are, there are always areas for improvement. Ongoing needs assessment is an integral part of a high-performance mindset. Fewer than half (46 percent) of survey participants reported that their training needs are assessed. The figure is slightly lower for nonsupervisors (43 percent) and higher for leaders (51 percent). The wide range of percentages of employees in each agency who reported that their training needs are assessed (31 percent to 64 percent) reflects different emphases on the importance of continuing learning.

Somewhat more than half (55 percent) of survey participants responded that they were satisfied with the training they receive for their current job. Satisfaction varies substantially with age. Seventy percent of survey participants 25 and under and 60 percent of those aged 26 through 29 said they are satisfied, while 51 to 52 percent of participants from age 30 through 59 and 56 percent of those 60 or over reported satisfaction. When we look at the results by agency, we find a range of 38 percent to 71 percent.

We broadened the scope from job-specific training to development opportunities of all types when we asked survey participants if they are given a real opportunity to improve their skills. These opportunities could include job rotations, self-study programs, conferences, stretch assignments, participation in communities of practice,[41] cross-training, and other routes to learning in addition to traditional

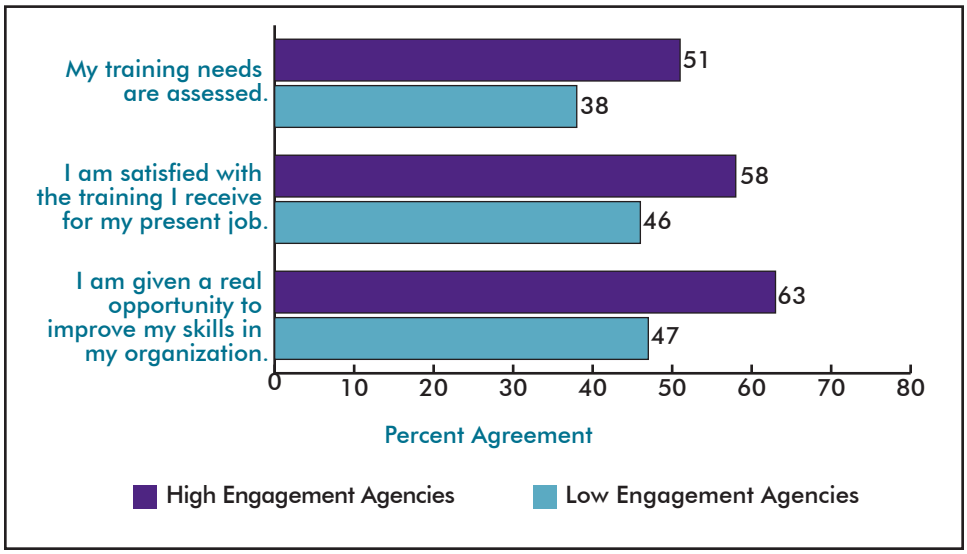
[41] Communities of practice are networks of people with a common interest in enhancing their knowledge or skills in a specific area. They meet in person or online to share information, experiences, and resources. They typically meet on a regularly scheduled basis, establish guidelines for their interactions, and have a designated leader who coordinates and facilitates the group's meetings.

classroom or on-line training courses. About 58 percent of survey participants agreed that they did have these types of opportunities. Agreement by agency ranged from 45 percent to 78 percent. There was a sizeable difference between leaders and nonsupervisors' perceptions, with 64 percent of leaders indicating they had skill development opportunities compared to 53 percent of nonsupervisors. This gap may be explained by the overall more favorable feelings leaders tend to have toward their organizations as well as the tendency many organizations in both the public and private sector have of investing more heavily in development for leaders than for other employees.

Perceived opportunity to improve skills steadily decreases as the age of survey participant increases. Thus, 67 percent of participants 25 years or younger agreed that they have a real opportunity to improve their skills in their organization but agreement drops to 62 percent for participants 26 through 29, to about 55 percent for those 30 through 49, and to 52 percent for participants 50 and above. Possible explanations for older employees' lower satisfaction with training and development opportunities are that more younger employees are in probationary status or working in internship or fellows programs in which more attention is given to assessing and meeting their development needs; less experienced workers may require more training to develop proficiency than their more experienced colleagues; or, older workers may be less likely to discuss their development needs with their supervisors. The differences may also be a result of agencies believing that older employees have reached the peak of their advancement potential and, given scarce development dollars, assigning priority to development for younger workers.

For all three of the survey questions about training and development, non-supervisory employees in the high engagement agencies had substantially higher percentages of favorable responses than non-supervisory employees in the low engagement agencies. **Figure 28** illustrates the differences between the two groups.

Figure 28: Nonsupervisory Employees' Perceptions of Training and Development Opportunities in High and Low Engagement Agencies



Agencies need to investigate the fairness of training opportunities. We also asked employees if they believed that they had been treated fairly in the past two years in receiving training. A majority of 65 percent believed they had been treated fairly while 25 percent said they had not. The remaining 10 percent said they didn't know or the question was not applicable to them. Although the percentage of employees who feel they are not receiving their fair share of training opportunities is not numerically high, if one-quarter of all employees feel they are not treated fairly, this perception can clearly have a negative impact on overall employee engagement. This issue warrants investigation in each agency to determine if employees are truly not being treated fairly in the area of development opportunities or if employees have misperceptions that can be addressed.

Summary

Our survey results indicate that Federal agencies could make more vigorous attempts to engage employees through providing more learning and development opportunities for them. Less than half of the survey participants reported that their training needs are assessed, an essential first step in planning effective development programs. Slightly more than half are satisfied with the training they receive for their current job and reported that they have a real opportunity to improve their skills. Many employees, especially more mature employees and nonsupervisors, would like to have more development opportunities than are currently available to them.

It would be helpful for agencies to examine their assumptions about the relative value of training for different groups—delineated, for example, by age, type of job, and supervisory status—and determine if they are indeed making the best decisions about the allocation of resources in terms of contributing to achievement of their missions. Even with scarce development dollars, learning opportunities can be expanded to all employees. There are many free and low-cost development options that agencies could encourage all employees to participate in, such as mentoring, job rotations, cross-training, free seminars and webinars, professional associations, communities of practice, and self-study of books and journals. More focus on offering growth opportunities can facilitate employee engagement. Substantially more employees in the high engagement agencies than in the low engagement agencies had positive views of the training and development opportunities available to them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this report, we analyzed data from the 2007 Merit Principles Survey to identify strengths and challenges in the management of the Federal workforce to drive employee engagement and facilitate high performance. We compared the practices in the agencies with the highest percentages of engaged employees with the practices in the agencies with the lowest percentages of engaged employees. We discovered that every positive performance management practice we reviewed is practiced more frequently in high engagement agencies than in low engagement agencies.

We found that the meaningfulness of work and pride in one's agency are solid strengths throughout the Federal workforce. The key areas that require attention are communication and trust between leaders and employees, and employee involvement, accountability, and recognition. We present here our conclusions then offer recommendations to increase employee engagement through improvements in each of these areas. The recommendations are based on the principle that performance management is a continuing dialogue between employees and their supervisors. The recommended actions can be characterized in three words: communication, connection, and courage. These are the foundation of effective performance management – communicating openly and honestly with employees, connecting with them as people to build good working relationships, and demonstrating the courage to address and resolve problems.

Conclusions

Good performance management practices are key factors in employee engagement. In our comparisons of the four agencies with the highest percentages of engaged employees with the four agencies with the lowest percentages of engaged employees, we discovered that every positive performance management practice we reviewed (e.g., senior leaders communicating open and honestly to employees; employees having written performance goals) is practiced more widely in high engagement agencies than in low engagement agencies.

Pride in One's Work Our survey results show that the vast majority of Federal employees take great pride in both their work and their organizations. They have a clear line of vision from their individual responsibilities to the achievement of their agency's mission and believe their work is important and meaningful. Pride in one's work, a prerequisite for employee engagement, is a solid strength of the Federal workforce.

Satisfaction With Leadership We found that employees' satisfaction with leadership is an area for focused attention and improvement for most agencies. While about two-thirds of employees think their direct supervisors are doing a good job as supervisors, employees have much less confidence in their higher level leaders. They indicated that these leaders are not communicating enough with them. Employees also believe that leaders' words and actions are not consistent and they are not honestly and openly sharing information. Inadequate communication may be keeping leaders from developing the trusting relationships and personal connections with employees that drive engagement.

Our comparisons of the agencies with the highest and lowest percentages of engaged employees show that leaders in the four high engagement agencies do a much better job of communicating and connecting with their nonsupervisory employees. In turn, employees in the high engagement agencies reported much higher levels of respect and trust in their leaders than did employees in the low engagement agencies.

Opportunity To Perform Well at Work

Performance Goals

The MPS data show mixed results for the engagement driver of having the opportunity to perform well at work. The majority of employees reported that their job responsibilities make good use of their competencies and that they are usually provided with the resources, time, and assistance they need to do their jobs. Although 71 percent of employees said they have written performance goals, substantially fewer said the goals are current or accurately define performance expectations. Supervisors who do not work with employees each performance period to define clear goals in terms of quantity, quality, and timelines are missing an excellent opportunity to increase both engagement and productivity.

Feedback

Although research repeatedly shows that giving feedback to their employees is the most important and effective action supervisors can take to improve work performance, 60 percent of employees said they receive informal or formal feedback only monthly or less often and 31 percent receive feedback twice per year or less. We also discovered that many Federal employees are not meeting regularly with their supervisors to discuss their work. In addition, we found that employees' trust and confidence in their supervisor declines as the frequency of meetings with their supervisor decreases. The essence of performance management is ongoing dialogue between employees and their supervisors, but this communication and connection is not occurring for many Federal employees. As Federal agencies strive to engage their employees, they need to provide leaders at all levels with opportunities to build skill and become comfortable with providing frequent, high quality feedback. They also need to help supervisors understand the value of developing a strong working relationship with each employee through regular progress reviews and informal conversations.

Positive Work Environment

Employee Involvement

Employee engagement can be facilitated by empowering employees to participate in the organization as partners with management. However, more than half of all the survey participants do not feel free to express their opinions to management.

About half of employees are satisfied with their involvement in decisions that affect their work. Only one-quarter of nonsupervisors and 35 percent of leaders reported that their input via surveys and other vehicles is used to make organizational improvements. However, the currently required annual employee surveys do not allow the time agencies need to plan and implement changes based on the data and then see alterations in employees' opinions as a result of the changes. It may easily take several years for program or practice changes to have a positive impact on employees' perceptions.

Employees in high engagement agencies reported much higher levels of involvement in their organizations than their peers in low engagement agencies providing evidence that employee empowerment is an important driver of engagement.

The Management of Poor Performers

The apparent ineffective management of poor performers is a persistent problem in all agencies although it is somewhat less severe in high engagement agencies. The fact that only one-tenth of one percent of eligible employees do not receive performance-based within-grade salary increases and the fact that less than one percent of employees receive less than fully successful performance ratings support employees' reports that poor performance is not being adequately addressed. Supervisors' inaction communicates to employees that good performance is not required or highly valued and can create resentment and frustration. The negative impact of poor performers is increased when other employees are asked to take on their work. And it appears that some Federal supervisors are dealing with poor performers by transferring their work to other employees. Only a small minority of supervisors reported that, as new supervisors, they received training in the skills needed to manage poor performers, including using the probationary period as the final step in the selection process to dismiss underperforming employees.

Satisfaction With the Recognition Received Accountability and recognition are key challenges in managing the Federal workforce for engagement. Accountability for results needs to be strengthened. About 65 percent of survey participants said they are held accountable for achieving results in the sense that if they achieve expected work results they experience positive consequences, while 57 percent agreed that they experience negative consequences when they do not achieve expected work results.

Performance Appraisal Ratings

Sixty-one percent of survey participants agreed that their performance appraisal is a fair reflection of their performance, while 63 percent understood what they had to accomplish to earn a different rating. The accuracy and fairness of performance appraisals is a complex issue because performance ratings may be influenced by multiple factors unrelated to performance and because most employees tend to significantly overestimate the level of their performance. It appears that many supervisors are being overly lenient in rating employees. The percentage of employees who believe their performance appraisals fairly reflect their actual performance would very likely be much lower than the current 61 percent if supervisors rated employees less leniently.

Communication, not a formal appraisal system, is the key to accountability
When performance ratings are not closely tied to compensation, their value may be questioned. The critical success factor in holding employees accountable is the ongoing communication the supervisor has with each employee. Performance appraisals and other formal systems are simply communication aids; they are not essential. Each agency's leaders need to consider how the agency's current performance appraisal system helps or hinders the workforce from achieving the agency's mission and then take action to make needed changes.

Recognition
Half of our survey participants indicated that they are rewarded for providing high quality products and services to their customers and that recognition and rewards in their work unit are based on performance. Just over half, 55 percent, said they are treated fairly in receiving performance awards, while 51 percent believe promotions are based on merit. Although recent improvement is evident, the perceived lack of connection between recognition and performance has been a continuing problem in the Federal workforce. Because funds for monetary recognition are scarce, it is important for leaders to think creatively about how they can reward employees with non-monetary acknowledgements of good performance.

Prospect for Future Personal and Professional Growth Many Federal agencies are not taking advantage of the opportunity to engage their employees through providing avenues for personal and professional growth. Although a prerequisite to efficient and effective learning is the identification of competencies that employees need to strengthen, fewer than half of our survey participants reported that their training needs are assessed. Only about half of survey participants reported that they are satisfied with the training they receive for their current job as well as other opportunities to improve their skills. Although funds for development may be in short supply, free and low-cost learning options are often available.

Recommendations

For All Employees

1. **Take an active role in managing your own performance.**
   You are responsible for your own work performance. If you need more guidance, direction, or feedback than you are receiving, ask for it. Your supervisor may not know that you need help. Reflect frequently on your own performance and consider how you can improve it. Request feedback from your supervisor, peers, team members, and customers and ask for clarification if you need it. Accept that you may not always agree with the feedback you receive but you always need to listen to it with an open mind and learn from it. Talk with your supervisor or team leader about how you can apply others' feedback and your own ideas to increase the value of your contributions to your organization.

2. **Adopt a continuous learning mindset.**
   Talk candidly with your supervisor about your development needs and goals. No matter how much education and experience you have, you can always learn

more and enhance your performance. Work with your supervisor to create and implement a focused development plan with clear objectives that include both enhancing your strengths and overcoming problem areas that may be impeding you from performing at your best. It is valuable to clearly define and document your goals because if you do so, you are much more likely to pursue them. Take advantage of the development opportunities offered to you and create your own.

There are many free and low-cost learning opportunities available. A few examples are:

- Read journals, trade magazines, or books in your field
- Talk to colleagues in other organizations to find out about their practices and share what you have learned with your coworkers
- Join a professional association and attend local meetings and seminars
- Coach a peer or new employee in an area in which you are strong
- Ask your supervisor if you can rotate responsibilities in your work group
- When you complete a project, reflect on what went well and what could be improved. Take the time to document the lessons learned and share them with your colleagues
- Participate in free webinars and seminars offered to Government employees
- Create and participate in a community of practice with interested colleagues.

Try incorporating your development into your everyday routine. Just 15 minutes each day can make a big difference over a year's time. For example, in 15 minutes, you can read an article or half a book chapter, reflect on feedback you recently received and figure out how to apply it, plan how you will increase your efficiency, or observe a colleague expertly performing a task you find difficult.

Become an advocate for positive change in your work group. Do not be content with the status quo. Speak up and suggest improvements for your work unit processes and practices to your supervisor and colleagues. Encourage others to suggest ideas and support their efforts. You will help your colleagues and yourself create a more engaging work life as well as improve your work unit's performance.

3. **Prepare carefully for progress review meetings.**
For individual meetings with your supervisor, prepare a list of issues you want to discuss and questions you want to ask. Be prepared to summarize your progress on assignments and your accomplishments. Although supervisors have the responsibility to review and document employees' work throughout the year, they may not be aware of everything employees accomplish. Consider barriers to high performance you may be facing and ask your supervisor for help in overcoming them. Think honestly about your strengths and weaknesses and note what went well and what could have been better in each of your assignments. Note the progress you have made on implementing your development plan since your last meeting. Consider any revisions or additions that need to be made to the plan based on your recent experiences.

For Leaders at All Levels (Supervisors, Managers, and Executives)

1. **Hire with care and use the probationary period as part of the selection process.** The best way to avoid performance problems is to invest the time and effort required to hire only candidates who have a high potential for success in the job. First, clearly define both the technical and non-technical competencies and other qualifications required for high performance in the job before you plan your recruiting and selection strategies. Second, provide applicants with a clear, accurate job description that includes the competencies required for success as well as a realistic preview of the pros and cons of the job and the work environment. This approach will reduce the number of applicants who are not well suited for the job. Third, ensure that all of the critical competencies and qualifications needed for the job are assessed. Use a multiple hurdle approach in which only the best qualified move on to the next step in the selection process. For example, you could use a resume review followed by a structured panel interview, a work sample, a second set of structured interviews, and reference checks. The probability of selecting the best person for the job increases if several valid and reliable assessment procedures are used in succession.[42]

   Be cautious in using performance appraisal ratings as part of the selection process. As we have discussed, appraisal ratings are subject to many forms of intentional and unintentional distortion including rating inflation. Because appraisal ratings may not be accurate indicators of past performance, they should not be relied upon to predict performance in a new position.

   Use the probationary period as it was intended, as the final step in the selection process. Of all the methods one can use to select employees, the probationary period is the most accurate indicator of how the employee will perform on the job in the long term because it allows you to observe the new employee actually doing the job. It is your final opportunity to evaluate new employees' ability to contribute to your work unit before their positions become permanent. When candidates accept a job, you need to inform them that they will be on probation for the designated period. When a new employee begins work, you need to explain the performance expectations and make it clear that they will be dismissed if these expectations are not met during the probationary period. Then, follow through and separate employees who are not performing well during their probationary period. Over the years, MSPB has repeatedly recommended that supervisors use the probationary period to identify employees who are not a good fit for the job. Taking the probationary period seriously and separating employees whose performance indicates they will not be successful requires courage but it is a critical part of the job of every supervisor.[43]

[42] MSPB has published several reports that provide more information about assessment and hiring: *Reforming Federal Hiring: Beyond Faster and Cheaper (2007), Reference Checking in Federal Hiring: Making the Call (2005)*, and *The Federal Selection Interview: Unrealized Potential* (2003). All are available on our web site at www.mspb.gov.

[43] For detailed information about the probationary period, see the MSPB report, *The Probationary Period: A Critical Assessment Opportunity* (2005), available from our web site at www.mspb.gov.

2. **Develop a strong working relationship with each employee.**
   Remember that the essence of performance management is an ongoing dialogue between employees and their supervisors. Develop strong working relationships with each of your employees by talking individually with them informally and frequently (e.g., two or three times weekly) and getting to know them as people. You can also offer informal feedback about their work and thank them for their contributions. If employees feel a strong connection to you as their leader and feel valued by you, they will be more engaged in their work and perform better. In addition, the more you know about each employee, the better you will be able to tailor your supervisory approach to their needs. Employees may not come to you with day-to-day concerns but if you ask them about their work, they will share them, allowing you to help them overcome barriers to high performance and learn about issues before they become big problems.

3. **Meet regularly with each employee to review progress and provide feedback.**
   Schedule regular meetings with each employee to discuss the employee's progress and provide both positive and corrective feedback. Regularly scheduled individual meetings provide the opportunity for the supervisor and employee to personally connect with each other at a deeper level than the informal check-ins and nurture a strong working relationship. These meetings provide a vehicle for discussing the employee's progress on current assignments and any obstacles that may be impeding success; providing feedback and recognition; explaining new assignments; communicating high expectations for performance; providing information about the work unit or organization; responding to the employee's questions or concerns; and reviewing progress on development plans. Individual meetings are also a good time to solicit the employee's ideas about what is going well and what could be improved in the work unit.

   The optimal frequency of these individual meetings will vary with the employee, his or her assignments, and the job. Monthly is usually a minimum time frame. Many supervisors like to meet with each employee weekly or every two weeks so they can promptly identify and address any potential problems and they have dedicated private time with the employee to offer feedback.

4. **Model requesting and applying feedback.**
   Model requesting and applying feedback for your employees by asking them for feedback and then discussing with them how you plan to use the feedback. You can directly ask for feedback when you meet with them individually or in a group setting such as a staff meeting. This requires courage but it presents a forceful example for your employees on the importance of asking for and using feedback. An alternative approach is to ask for their feedback anonymously through an upward feedback instrument[44] or simply by asking them to answer three questions about you in writing: *What should I stop doing? What should I*

[44] An upward feedback instrument is a questionnaire in which employees rate their supervisor on a series of specific management skills such as making assignments or providing feedback. Most instruments also provide space for employees to write narrative comments. The supervisor uses the employees' ratings and narratives to identify personal strengths and weaknesses for development. A multi-source or 360 feedback instrument solicits information from the supervisor's manager, employees, peers, and sometimes, customers and suppliers.

start doing? What should I continue doing? From your employees' responses to these three questions, you can obtain a wealth of valuable information that you can immediately apply. You can also share with your employees the feedback you receive from your own manager or customers and discuss how you plan to use this feedback.

5. **Provide all employees with the opportunity to grow and develop.**
Conduct annual or semi-annual assessments of each employee's strengths and development needs. Conduct the assessments both for the purpose of development planning and to identify strengths so that employees can be assigned to tasks in which they can apply their talents. These assessments can be conducted through an informal discussion with each employee, but specific development goals and the strategies to achieve the goals should be documented in the employee's individual development plan for follow-up throughout the year.

   Provide development opportunities for all employees, including both specific training needed for the current job and wider competency development. If possible, allow employees time on the job to pursue job-related development. Even 30 or 60 minutes per week can help them build their knowledge and skills. Even with small or nonexistent training budgets, you can make growth experiences available to your employees. Remember that participation in formal training and conferences are only two of many possible avenues for development. There are many free or low-cost development options. For example, such simple activities as having employees share journal or trade magazine articles or past work experiences in staff meetings can build employees' professional knowledge base.

6. **Hold all employees accountable for their performance. Manage poor performance promptly and assertively.**
Hold all employees accountable for their performance by:

   - Consistently communicating high performance expectations
   - Working with each employee to define individual performance goals with specified outcomes and timelines
   - Meeting regularly with employees to review their progress toward achieving their goals
   - Regularly reviewing employees' work
   - Providing frequent constructive feedback and coaching
   - Providing recognition and other positive consequences for good work
   - Taking prompt corrective action when employees are not performing well, making it clear that continuing poor performance will not be tolerated, and following up with negative consequences if the poor performance continues
   - Avoiding transferring low or poor performers' work to others.

For Managers, Executives, and Agencies

1. **Use employee survey results and additional employee input to identify strengths and weaknesses. Use this information to work with employees to create and implement an action plan to build a high performance organization.**

   It is essential for continued employee engagement that agencies use the feedback that employees provide in the Merit Principles Survey, agency surveys, and other forms of input such as focus groups, suggestion boxes, web feedback forms, and discussions in staff meetings. Leaders should follow up with employees, explain how their feedback was used, or if it was not used, why. It is important to manage employees' expectations so that they understand that their suggestions are considered carefully even though not all can be implemented. In the case of annual surveys, most agencies will probably not have the resources to carefully analyze and apply the results every year and thus should explain how employees' input will be used. For example, an agency could explain that the survey results are used to identify trends over time and an intensive effort to analyze and apply the data is made every three years.

   Those who contribute suggestions or otherwise work for improvement should be recognized and rewarded. It is frustrating for employees who want to make a positive difference and invest time and effort in completing surveys or responding to other requests for input to see nothing happen with their input. They soon stop contributing their ideas. Consistently treating employees as partners in achieving agency goals sends a strong message to employees that they are critical for the success of the organization and their leaders are depending on them. Listening to employees' ideas and openly recognizing their value by acting on them are powerful approaches to building engagement.

2. **Build employee trust and confidence through frequent, open communication.**

   Communicate, communicate, communicate! The time you invest in communicating with employees at all levels will pay off handsomely with higher productivity and commitment and greater trust in leadership. Employees typically want five types of information from managers and executives:

   - What are our mission and goals and our strategies for achieving those goals?
   - What can I do to contribute?
   - How will you demonstrate that you value and respect me as your partner in achieving our mission?
   - What progress are we making in achieving organizational goals?
   - What problems are we facing?

Select several communication methods that are best for you and your organization, being sure to choose at least a couple of methods that involve face-to-face contact with employees. Face-to-face meetings are vital for building trust and mutual respect. A few examples of effective communication methods are:

- Semi-annual, quarterly, or monthly in-person meetings with all employees in the agency, division, or subdivision to review progress and discuss goals and priorities (with videoconferencing or teleconferencing for field locations or very large groups but on a rotational basis meet in person with employees at different locations)
- Town halls in which employees are encouraged to ask questions and share their perspectives
- Symposiums on a particular topic such as how to cut costs or provide better customer service
- Celebrations of major accomplishments such as exceeding organizational goals
- Special events in which employees share their accomplishments and lessons learned
- Informal coffee hours or brown bag lunches in which small groups of employees meet with you
- Walking around and talking to employees at all levels and locations, asking them how things are going, what's on their mind, or what they need to do their jobs better
- Electronic question and answer forums (employees enter questions and leaders post their answers)
- E-mail bulletins and memos
- Voice mail broadcasts

Whatever methods of communication you choose to build trust with employees, it is essential to be honest, admit mistakes, and align words and actions. It is also critical to encourage employees to safely express their concerns and perspectives and ensure there are no negative repercussions for them when they do so.

3. **Engage new employees with an onboarding program.**
Nurture new employees by providing an onboarding program that makes them feel welcome and valued, helps them build good relationships with coworkers, equips them with the information and resources they need to perform well, and helps them adapt to the culture and operation of the organization. The program should start as soon as the new hire accepts the job and extend through the

first year of employment. Research shows that effective onboarding programs build engagement, improve performance, decrease time to full productivity, and increase retention.[45]

4. **Closely link recognition and rewards to performance.**
Develop and heavily communicate to employees a recognition program that tightly links recognition to performance. Ensure that recognition and rewards are available to all employees who perform well. Informal and formal acknowledgement of employees' contributions at individual and team levels should be a way of life in the organization. Inform all employees in a work unit or organization when an employee receives a reward, be it large or small, so that coworkers see the connection between performance and rewards. Describe the outcomes achieved by the individual and the positive impact on the organization and its customers.

   Use within-grade salary increases as a recognition tool. Award these only to employees who have met or exceeded expectations, i.e., performed at a "fully successful" or higher level, and let them know they are receiving the salary increase because of their successful performance. If no mention of the increase is given to the employee and it simply appears in the paycheck, an opportunity for recognition is lost and employees come to think of salary increases as an entitlement rather than recognition of good performance. Be sure that all supervisors clearly understand the process for denying the within-grade increase and that they know they can count on being supported by leaders at every level when they award within-grade increases only on the basis of merit.

   Set aside more funds for monetary awards and distribute them judiciously, giving the rewards only to those who most deserve them. The approach used by some organizations in which they spread limited award money among most employees is not an effective recognition approach. The value of an award depends on it being presented only to those who have truly earned it through meritorious service. Develop non-monetary recognition practices so that awards are not constrained by available funds.

5. **Select supervisors who will effectively manage performance.**
Select supervisors who can and will actively manage employee performance. Supervisors must have good personal interaction skills, be able to coach employees and provide both positive and corrective feedback, review work and hold people accountable, and assertively address performance problems. In the recruiting process for supervisory positions, provide a realistic job preview of a supervisor's responsibilities. Many employees aspire to become supervisors because it entails a promotion and pay increase but few understand how demanding the job is. In the job preview, emphasize that supervisors are responsible for effectively managing poor performers and that this may require

[45] The Partnership for Public Service has published a helpful guide for Federal agencies to planning onboarding programs, *Getting on Board: A Model for Integrating and Engaging Employees*, May 2008. It is available from the Partnership's web site at www.ourpublicservice.org.

a high degree of managerial courage as well as the ability to deal well with uncomfortable situations and make tough decisions. It is important to note that many of the competencies required for good management such as strong communication and interpersonal skills, the ability to deal effectively with conflict, and sound judgment, are not easily developed. Candidates need to possess these competencies when they are hired.

Federal regulations require that employees be placed on probation when they assume a supervisory position. The probationary period is the final step in the selection process and new supervisors need to be fully informed of this requirement. Use the probationary period to carefully observe and assess the performance management competency of the newly hired supervisor. If a supervisor is not effectively managing the performance of employees, then he or she should not remain in a supervisory position.

6. **Hold supervisors accountable for effective performance management.**
Make it clear to every supervisor that he or she is personally responsible for effectively managing performance to produce results, including: defining performance goals; regularly reviewing employees' work; frequently meeting with employees to discuss their progress; providing helpful coaching and feedback; guiding employee development; recognizing good performance; and effectively dealing with poor performers. On a regular basis, discuss with each supervisor how he or she is managing performance and any problems or obstacles encountered.

7. **Provide supervisors with the training, resources, and management support they need to effectively manage their employees to achieve high performance.**
Equip supervisors with the skills they need to effectively manage their employees. Training and development should focus on practical strategies for defining performance goals, reviewing work, providing feedback, recognizing good performance, preventing low performance, and managing poor performers. The training should emphasize that supervisors must use the probationary period as the final step in the selection process to release employees who do not demonstrate acceptable performance. It also should stress that supervisors should not reward poor performers by assigning their tasks to others.

Training should include substantial practice with feedback and opportunities to hone skills using the feedback. Make certain the training program includes post-training support to ensure that learning is transferred to the job. Training will be most effective when a leader from the agency who is skilled in managing employee performance serves as a co-instructor and provides actual on-the-job examples and emphasizes how effective performance management impacts the organization.

Do not assume that because a leader has completed a training course he or she is skilled in managing performance. It takes experience and coaching to develop strong performance management skills. Model effective performance

management for the supervisors you manage by providing them with ample feedback. Provide them with the help and support they need to handle tough situations such as managing poor performers. Remove organizational obstacles to taking justified action against poor performers.

8. **Evaluate the effectiveness of your agency's current performance appraisal system.**
   Consider how your agency's current performance appraisal system facilitates or impedes the achievement of your agency's mission then take action to make needed changes. Discuss questions such as:

   - Do our performance appraisals contribute to our efforts to hold employees accountable for their work?
   - How are we using the performance appraisals to identify employees who deserve special recognition for their work?
   - Do our performance appraisals facilitate honest communication between supervisors and their employees?
   - Are the ratings and narratives accurate assessments of employee performance?
   - Should we continue to use our current system and enforce accurate assessment?
   - Do multiple-level ratings make sense in an environment where they are not used to make salary decisions?
   - Has our performance appraisal system become a tedious, meaningless exercise or a barrier people have to work around?
   - Are there other, more effective ways of documenting performance and holding employees accountable?
   - What are the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives?

     Involve employees in the discussion and solicit their ideas for alternative approaches.

For Consideration By Congress

Consider modifying the requirement for annual agency employee surveys to require employee surveys every two or three years.

Determine if the benefits of annual surveys for every agency justify the high costs. Yearly surveys often do not allow agencies the time required to analyze the data, implement indicated changes in organizational programs or practices, and see the results of those changes. In addition, the changes from year to year may be the result of variables not related to changes in employee perceptions or actions taken by the agency. For example, differences in sample size or composition, survey response

rates, or placement of questions in the survey from one year to the next can result in changes of several percentage points independent of actual changes in employee perceptions. Thus, year to year changes may be difficult to interpret. Trends over time provide a clearer perspective.

Administering annual surveys also sets overly high employee expectations. When employees are asked to provide input in a survey, they want to see something positive happen as a result. When they don't, they feel disappointed and disempowered and are less likely to contribute input in the future. Conducting employee surveys every two or three years would provide agencies with more accurate information about the perceptions of their employees and allow them the time they need to interpret the results and make indicated changes while reducing by half or more the cost of the annual surveys.

These Merit Systems Protection Board recommendations—based on our survey and other research—are designed to help produce the highly engaged employees invaluable to agency mission achievement. Two of the recommendations could be deemed countercultural: consistently using the probationary period as the final step in selection to identify and separate employees who are not suited for the job and abolishing the near-automatic awarding of within-grade salary increases and, instead, awarding them only when merited. Although these actions require courage on the part of supervisors, we believe they are essential for holding employees accountable for their work. The successful implementation of these recommendations depends on agency leaders at all levels providing intensive, ongoing communication and education to help employees understand and accept that differentiation of employees on the basis of performance is both necessary and desirable to create a high performance workforce.

Appendix A: 2007 Merit Principles Survey Methodology

The Merit Systems Protection Board conducts studies of the Federal civilian workforce to determine if the workforce is being managed effectively, efficiently, and in accordance with the Federal merit system principles. One way we fulfill this responsibility is by periodically conducting the Governmentwide Merit Principles Survey (MPS).

Administration:
The MPS 2007 was administered in the fall of 2007 to 68,789 Federal employees in the 30 departments and agencies listed below. It was distributed via the Internet to most employees; 500 employees who did not have access to the Internet received a paper copy of the survey.

Survey Versions:
Two versions of the 2007 MPS were administered: (1) an annual survey version that included all questions required by the Office of Personnel Management for the mandated annual agency employee surveys in addition to the MPS questions; (2) a standard version that included only the MPS questions. The annual survey version was administered to the employees in the 15 agencies that had contracted with MSPB to administer their annual surveys embedded in the Merit Principles Survey. The annual survey questions were included to allow the employees in these agencies to complete both their agency's annual survey and the Merit Principles Survey in one administration. Both versions included all the questions discussed in this report. The annual survey version is contained in Appendix C.

Response Rate:
Survey participation was voluntary. There was a 60 percent response rate (41,577 employees completed the survey).

Sample:
A representative, random sample of employees from each participating agency was selected from the population of 1.6 million full-time, permanent, nonseasonal Federal employees who were working in executive branch agencies as of December 2006. For most agencies, a sample of 2,000 employees was selected including 1,000 nonsupervisory employees (individual workers and team leaders) and 1,000 leaders (supervisors, managers, and executives). Nonsupervisors and leaders were separately sampled to allow analyses of differences between these two groups.

Weighting:
Weighting eliminates over or under representation of a group in the survey results. When combined results are reported for all employees in all agencies, the results are weighted for both agency size and supervisory status. When results are reported separately for nonsupervisors and leaders, the results are weighted for agency size. The responses for questions are weighted by agency according to the number of survey respondents from each agency compared with the actual population proportions of employees who work in each agency. The responses to the questions are weighted for supervisory status according to the number of survey respondents compared with the actual population proportions for supervisory and nonsupervisory employees as provided in the Central Personnel Data File.

Margin of Error:
A confidence level and confidence interval, or margin of error, provide an indication of the reliability of survey responses. These are based on the number of randomly selected employees who responded to the survey questions compared with the population of Federal employees. For the MPS 2007, we have an overall 99 percent level of confidence that the responses given by the employees who answered the survey questions can be generalized to all Federal employees in our population with a margin of error of less than 1 percent. For example, if 83 percent of the responding employees agreed that their workload is reasonable, we can be confident that 82 to 84 percent of all Federal employees, if given the opportunity to answer this question, would also say that their workload was reasonable. The 1-percent margin of error is a good indicator for the Federal workforce overall. However, the margin of error for each individual agency will vary with the survey sample size for that agency compared with the agency's population. Because the confidence level and margin of error are dependent on sample size, the confidence level decreases and the corresponding margin of error increases as the sample size decreases relative to the population of employees.

Participating Agencies:

- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Defense
  - Air Force
  - Army
  - Navy
  - Other Defense
- Department of Education
- Department of Energy
- Environmental Protection Agency

- Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
- Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of the Interior
- Department of Justice
- Department of Labor
- Merit Systems Protection Board
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- National Archives and Records Administration
- Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board
- Office of Personnel Management
- Smithsonian Institution
- Department of State
- Securities and Exchange Commission
- Social Security Administration
- Department of the Treasury
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Veterans Affairs

Appendix B: Comparison Of Performance Management Practices In High and Low Engagement Agencies

Nonsupervisory employees' responses to the 2007 Merit Principles Survey questions about performance management practices in the four agencies with the highest percentages of engaged employees were compared with the responses of the nonsupervisory employees in the four agencies with the lowest percentages of engaged employees. The figures in the table below are the percentages of employees who affirmed the existence of the practice by providing favorable responses (either "strongly agree" and "agree" or "very satisfied" and "satisfied" except where noted).

Survey questions that also appeared in the 2005 MPS that were used to create an engagement scale and identify the percentage of engaged employees in each agency were not included in these comparisons of performance management practices in high and low engagement agencies.[46]

[46] The methodology applied to develop the engagement scale is described in MSPB's previous report, *The Power of Federal Employee Engagement*, 2008 available on our website: www.mspb.gov.

MPS 2007 Question	High Engagement Agencies	Low Engagement Agencies	Difference Between High & Low
My Job		Percent	
My workload is reasonable.	68.4	64.4	4.0
My talents are used well in the workplace.	71.5	56.3	15.2
How often do you receive the information and guidance you need to do your job well?[a]	63.8	56.5	7.3
How often do you do more than your fair share of work because of the poor performance or low productivity of one or more of your coworkers?[b]	40.5	31.2	9.3
How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?	59.3	43.7	15.6
My Immediate Supervisor			
My supervisor communicates high performance expectations to employees.	70.1	59.5	10.6
My supervisor talks with me or assists me when I need help.	75.9	70.3	5.6
My supervisor compliments me when I do a good job.	73.7	68.5	5.2
My supervisor explains the reasons for work changes before they take place.	62.1	51.7	10.4

a = Responses of Always or almost always and Most of the time
b = Responses of Rarely or never and Usually not

MPS 2007 Question	High Engagement Agencies	Low Engagement Agencies	Difference Between High & Low
My Immediate Supervisor (continued)		**Percent**	
My supervisor works hard to maintain and improve our work unit's performance.	67.7	58.5	9.2
My supervisor follows through on commitments.	70.4	61.3	9.1
My supervisor speaks up for employees.	65.2	52.5	12.7
I have trust and confidence in my supervisor.	68.5	59.1	9.4
My supervisor demonstrates a high level of integrity.	73.5	66.3	7.2
My supervisor has a good understanding of my job performance and accomplishments.	70.8	63.2	7.6
The frequency with which my supervisor meets with me to discuss my work is (not often enough, about right, too often).[c]	74.0	66.0	8.0
How helpful is your supervisor's feedback in helping you improve or enhance your performance?[d]	79.5	73.1	6.4
Overall, how would you rate your immediate supervisor's performance as a supervisor?[e]	71.5	63.2	8.3

c = Responses of About right
d = Responses of Very helpful and Somewhat helpful
e = Responses of Very good or Good

MPS 2007 Question	High Engagement Agencies	Low Engagement Agencies	Difference Between High & Low
Performance Management		**Percent**	
Do you have written individual performance goals that clearly define the results you are expected to achieve?[f]	75.6	61.3	14.3
I am held accountable for achieving results in the sense that if I achieve the expected work results, I experience positive consequences.	70.9	58.7	12.2
I am held accountable for achieving results in the sense that if I do NOT achieve the expected work results, I experience negative consequences.	60.8	56.6	4.2
Appropriate, objective measures are used to evaluate my performance.	61.2	48.1	13.1
My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance.	68.7	56.6	12.1
In my most recent performance appraisal, I understood what I had to do to be rated at different performance levels.	67.0	55.1	11.9
In my work unit, steps are taken to deal with a poor performer who cannot or will not improve.	35.3	23.8	11.5
I am rewarded for providing high quality products and services to my customers.	57.6	43.8	13.8
Promotions in my work unit are based on merit.	55.9	45.2	10.7

f = Responses of Yes

MPS 2007 Question	High Engagement Agencies	Low Engagement Agencies	Difference Between High & Low
Managers and Executives in My Organization		**Percent**	
The information collected in surveys and other forms of employee input is used to make improvements in my organization.	28.3	24.0	4.3
I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders.	54.9	39.9	15.0
In my organization, leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.	44.0	27.5	16.5
Managers and executives demonstrate consistency between words and actions.	42.9	26.2	16.7
Managers and executives are open and honest in sharing information with employees.	42.4	26.4	16.0
I can express my point of view to management without fear of negative consequences.	52.2	34.8	17.4
Managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization.	62.7	50.3	12.4
How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management about what's going on in your organization?	49.2	36.5	12.7
Training and Development			
My training needs are assessed.	50.8	37.8	13.0
How satisfied are you with the training you receive for your present job?	58.4	45.5	12.9

Appendix C: The 2007 Merit Principles Survey

MERIT PRINCIPLES SURVEY 2007
U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD

OMB Control No. 3124-0014
RCS# MSPB-2007-001. Expires December 31, 2007

Dear Federal Colleague:

Your opinion counts! The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) asks that you take a few minutes to participate in our Merit Principles Survey 2007—a Government-wide survey of Federal employees that covers a variety of workforce issues, including supervision, employee development, performance management, and more. Because you are part of a random sample of Government employees, your views about your work and work environment will represent those of the larger Federal workforce. This is an opportunity for you to inform policy by voicing your opinions and concerns about workforce issues.

This survey is an important part of MSPB's responsibility to assess the soundness of Federal merit systems. Your responses will help us recommend to the President, Congress, agency leaders, and other decision makers how to improve the Federal workplace. The information you share will make a positive difference!

Your responses to this survey are voluntary and **strictly confidential**. Only MSPB staff and our survey support contractor staff will have access to the surveys and no data will be disclosed to anyone that could be used to identify individual participants.

On average, the survey will take about 20 minutes for employees to complete and about 30 minutes for supervisors. It may be completed at your work site or at home. Additional information about the Merit Principles Survey is available by clicking the "MSPB Studies" tab on MSPB's website (www.mspb.gov). If you have questions about this survey, please email us at MeritPrinciplesSurvey@mspb.gov or call our survey hotline at 1-888-260-4798 or 202-653-8896 (V/TDD) for live support Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern and voice mail at all other times.

Thank you! We appreciate your help.

Sincerely,

John Crum, Ph.D.
Acting Director, Policy and Evaluation

U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD

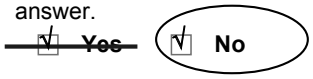
Privacy Statement

MSPB wants to assure survey participants that your involvement in the Merit Principles Survey 2007 is both voluntary and confidential. This Privacy Statement identifies MSPB's authorization to conduct the survey and explains how we will manage the data we receive.

- The purpose of collecting this information is to study how well the Federal Government is managing its workforce in adherence to the merit system principles. The results of the survey will be shared with the President, Congress, and other Federal decision-makers to be used in developing policy that supports both merit and mission accomplishment.
- Collection of the information is authorized by Section 1204 of Title 5, US Code.
- This survey has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget in accordance with 5 CFR 1320.
- Your responses to this survey are completely voluntary. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate. However, we encourage your participation to ensure that our data is complete and representative of the Federal workforce.
- Only MSPB staff and our survey support contractor staff will have access to individually completed surveys. In accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-579), no data will be disclosed that could be used to identify individual participants.
- Your agency may receive the raw data to be analyzed by agency staff, but MSPB will cleanse the data in such a way as to ensure that whatever data we give to agencies cannot be used to identify individual participants.

Marking Instructions

- Place a √ in the box next to your response.
- Please use a No. 2 pencil or blue or black ink.
- Please print when you write in your response.
- To change your answer, cross out the incorrect answer and put a √ in the correct box. Also draw a circle around the correct answer.



Definitions of Survey Terms

Executives are members of the Senior Executive Service or equivalent.

Leaders are an agency's management team. This includes anyone with supervisory or managerial duties including supervisors, managers, and executives.

Managers are those individuals in management positions who typically supervise one or more supervisors.

Organization means an agency, office, or division.

Supervisors are first-line supervisors who do not supervise other supervisors; typically those who are responsible for employees' performance appraisals and approval of their leave.

Team leaders are those who provide employees with day-to-day guidance in work projects, but do not have supervisory responsibilities or conduct performance appraisals.

Work unit means an employee's immediate work unit headed by the employee's direct supervisor.

U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD

Agency and Supervisory Status

Please select your agency or agency component.

- ❑ **Defense**: Air Force
- ❑ **Defense**: Army
- ❑ **Defense**: Navy
- ❑ **Defense**: Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)
- ❑ **Defense**: Other DoD Office, Agency, or Field Activity (including those administratively serviced by DLA)
- ❑ **Energy**: Headquarters Staff and Support Offices
- ❑ **Energy**: Power Marketing Administrations
- ❑ **Energy**: The Under Secretary
- ❑ **Energy**: The Under Secretary for Science
- ❑ **Energy**: The Under Secretary for Nuclear Security (NNSA)
- ❑ **Energy**: Other
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 1
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 2
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 3
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 4
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 5
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 6
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 7
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 8
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 9
- ❑ **EPA**: Region 10
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of the Administrator
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Administration and Resources Management
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Air and Radiation
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Chief Financial Officer
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Enforcement Compliance Assurance
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Environmental Information
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of General Counsel
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Inspector General
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of International Affairs
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Prevention, Pesticides, and Toxic Substances
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Research and Development
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response
- ❑ **EPA**: Office of Water
- ❑ **Federal Energy Regulatory Commission**
- ❑ **Interior**: Bureau of Indian Affairs
- ❑ **Interior**: Bureau of Land Management – Headquarters
- ❑ **Interior**: Bureau of Land Management – Field
- ❑ **Interior**: Bureau of Reclamation
- ❑ **Interior**: Fish and Wildlife Service – Headquarters
- ❑ **Interior**: Fish and Wildlife Service – Regional Office
- ❑ **Interior**: Fish and Wildlife Service – Field Office
- ❑ **Interior**: Minerals Management Service – Offshore Minerals Management
- ❑ **Interior**: Minerals Management Service – Minerals Revenue Management
- ❑ **Interior**: Minerals Management Service - Other
- ❑ **Interior**: National Park Service – Headquarters
- ❑ **Interior**: National Park Service – Regional Office/Center
- ❑ **Interior**: National Park Service – Park
- ❑ **Interior**: Office of the Inspector General
- ❑ **Interior**: Office of the Secretary: Assistant Secretary, Policy, Management, and Budget
- ❑ **Interior**: Office of the Secretary – National Business Center
- ❑ **Interior**: Office of the Secretary – Other
- ❑ **Interior**: Office of the Solicitor – Headquarters
- ❑ **Interior**: Office of the Solicitor – Field
- ❑ **Interior**: Office of Surface Mining – Headquarters
- ❑ **Interior**: Office of Surface Mining – Field
- ❑ **Interior**: United States Geological Survey – Headquarters
- ❑ **Interior**: United States Geological Survey – Eastern Region
- ❑ **Interior**: United States Geological Survey – Central Region
- ❑ **Interior**: United States Geological Survey – Western Region
- ❑ **Justice**: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives
- ❑ **Justice**: Bureau of Prisons
- ❑ **Justice**: Civil Division
- ❑ **Justice**: Justice Management Division
- ❑ **Justice**: Office of Justice Programs
- ❑ **Justice**: Other
- ❑ **Labor**: Bureau of Labor Statistics
- ❑ **Labor**: Employee Benefits Security Administration
- ❑ **Labor**: Employment Standards Administration
- ❑ **Labor**: Employment and Training Administration
- ❑ **Labor**: Mine Safety and Health Administration
- ❑ **Labor**: Occupational Safety and Health Administration
- ❑ **Labor**: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management
- ❑ **Labor**: Other
- ❑ **Merit Systems Protection Board**
- ❑ **NASA**: Ames Research Center
- ❑ **NASA**: Dryden Flight Research Center
- ❑ **NASA**: Glenn Research Center
- ❑ **NASA**: Goddard Space Flight Center
- ❑ **NASA**: Headquarters
- ❑ **NASA**: Johnson Space Center
- ❑ **NASA**: Kennedy Space Center
- ❑ **NASA**: Langley Research Center
- ❑ **NASA**: Marshall Space Flight Center
- ❑ **NASA**: Stennis Space Center
- ❑ **NASA**: Shared Service Center
- ❑ **National Archives and Records Administration**
- ❑ **Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board**
- ❑ **Securities and Exchange Commission**
- ❑ **SSA**: Deputy Commissioner for Human Resources
- ❑ **SSA:** Deputy Commissioner for Disability and Income Security Programs
- ❑ **SSA**: Deputy Commissioner for Business, Finance and Management
- ❑ **SSA**: Deputy Commissioner for Disability Adjudication and Review
- ❑ **SSA**: Deputy Commissioner for Communications

U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD - 1- FOR INFORMATION ONLY

- ❑ **SSA**: Deputy Commissioner for Legislation and Congressional Affairs
- ❑ **SSA**: Deputy Commissioner for Policy
- ❑ **SSA**: Deputy Commissioner for Systems
- ❑ **SSA**: Deputy Commissioner for Operations
- ❑ **SSA**: Other
- ❑ **Transportation**: Federal Aviation Administration
- ❑ **Transportation**: Federal Highway Administration
- ❑ **Transportation**: Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration
- ❑ **Transportation**: Federal Railroad Administration
- ❑ **Transportation**: Federal Transit Administration
- ❑ **Transportation**: Maritime Administration
- ❑ **Transportation**: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- ❑ **Transportation**: Office of the Secretary of Transportation
- ❑ **Transportation**: Office of the Inspector General
- ❑ **Transportation**: Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
- ❑ **Transportation**: Research and Innovative Technology Administration
- ❑ **Transportation**: Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation
- ❑ **Transportation**: Surface Transportation Board
- ❑ **Treasury**: Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau
- ❑ **Treasury**: Bureau of Engraving and Printing
- ❑ **Treasury**: Bureau of Public Debt
- ❑ **Treasury**: Departmental Offices
- ❑ **Treasury**: Financial Crimes Enforcement Network
- ❑ **Treasury**: Financial Management Service
- ❑ **Treasury**: Inspector General for Tax Administration
- ❑ **Treasury**: Internal Revenue Service
- ❑ **Treasury**: Office of the Comptroller of the Currency
- ❑ **Treasury**: Office of the Inspector General
- ❑ **Treasury**: Office of Thrift Supervision
- ❑ **Treasury**: United States Mint

What is your supervisory status?

- ❑ **Non-supervisor** (You do not supervise other employees.)
- ❑ **Team Leader** (You are not an official supervisor; you provide employees with day-to-day guidance in work projects, but do not have supervisory responsibilities or conduct performance appraisals.)
- ❑ **Supervisor** (You are responsible for employees' performance appraisals & approval of their leave, but you do not supervise other supervisors.)
- ❑ **Manager** (You are in a management position and supervise one or more supervisors.)
- ❑ **Executive** (Member of the Senior Executive Service or equivalent.)

Part A: My Job

A1. For each question, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. My agency is successful in accomplishing its mission	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. I would recommend my agency as a place to work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. The workforce has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. My work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. Employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
f. I like the kind of work I do	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
g. My workload is reasonable	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
h. My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
i. My talents are used well in the workplace	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
j. I know how my work relates to the agency's goals and priorities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
k. The work I do is important	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
l. The people I work with cooperate to get the job done	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

A2. For each question, please indicate how often the event occurs by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Rarely or Never	Usually Not	Some of the Time	Most of the Time	Always or Almost Always
a. How often can at least one of your co-workers fill in for you when you are not at work?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. How often do you have the resources you need to do your job well?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. How often do you receive the information and guidance you need to do your work efficiently and effectively?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. How often do you do more than your fair share of work because of the poor performance or low productivity of one or more of your co-workers?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

A3. For each question, please indicate your level of satisfaction by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
a. Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

A4. Overall, how good a job do you feel is being done by your immediate supervisor/team leader?

- ❑ Very good
- ❑ Good
- ❑ Fair
- ❑ Poor
- ❑ Very Poor

Part B: My Immediate Supervisor

B1. For each question, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. My supervisor communicates high performance expectations to employees	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. My supervisor talks with me or assists me when I need help	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. My supervisor treats me with courtesy and respect	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. My supervisor compliments me when I do a good job	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. My supervisor explains the reasons for work changes before they take place	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
f. My supervisor works hard to maintain and improve our work unit's performance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
g. My supervisor follows through on commitments	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
h. My supervisor speaks up for employees	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
i. I have trust and confidence in my supervisor	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
j. My supervisor makes decisions based on what is personally best for him or her rather than what is best for the organization	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
k. My supervisor demonstrates a high level of integrity	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
l. My supervisor has a good understanding of my job performance and accomplishments	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
m. My supervisor supports my need to balance work and family issues	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
n. Discussions with my supervisor/team leader about my performance are worthwhile	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

B2. About how often do you meet individually with your supervisor to discuss the progress of your work?

- ❑ Weekly or more often
- ❑ Every two weeks
- ❑ Monthly
- ❑ Quarterly
- ❑ Twice per year
- ❑ Annually
- ❑ Less than once per year

B3. The frequency with which my supervisor meets with me to discuss the progress of my work is:

- ❑ Not often enough
- ❑ About right
- ❑ Too often

B4. How often do you typically receive formal or informal feedback from your supervisor?

- ❑ Weekly or more often
- ❑ Every two weeks
- ❑ Monthly
- ❑ Quarterly
- ❑ Twice per year
- ❑ Annually
- ❑ Less than once per year

B5. How helpful is your supervisor's feedback in helping you improve or enhance your performance?

- ❑ Very Helpful
- ❑ Somewhat Helpful
- ❑ Not Helpful
- ❑ Harmful

B6. What does your supervisor do (or not do) that helps you do your best work? Please list one to three actions or behaviors. If your supervisor does not help you do your best work, write "none".

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B7. What does your supervisor do (or not do) that makes it difficult for you to do your best work? Please list one to three actions or behaviors. If your supervisor does not make it difficult for you to do your best work, write "none".

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B8. Overall, how would you rate your immediate supervisor's performance as a supervisor?

- ❑ Very Good
- ❑ Good
- ❑ Fair
- ❑ Poor
- ❑ Very Poor

Part C: Performance Management

C1. Do you have written individual performance goals that clearly define the results you are expected to achieve during the performance period?

- ❑ No ➔ *Skip to Question C5*
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Don't Know ➔ *Skip to Question C5*

C2. Have your individual performance goals been developed, reviewed, updated, or discussed with your supervisor for the current performance period (or if your performance period ended within the past two months, answer for your goals for the previous performance period)?

- ❑ No
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Don't Know

C3. Are your individual performance goals clearly linked to organizational or work unit goals?

- ❑ No
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Don't Know

C4. Do your individual performance goals accurately define what is expected of you?

- ❑ No
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Don't Know

C5. For each question, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. I am held accountable for achieving results in the sense that if I achieve the expected work results, I experience positive consequences	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. I am held accountable for achieving results in the sense that if I do NOT achieve the expected work results, I experience negative consequences.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. Appropriate, objective measures are used to evaluate my performance.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. In my most recent performance appraisal, I understood what I had to do to be rated at different performance levels (e.g., Fully Successful, Outstanding).	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
f. In my work unit, steps are taken to deal with a poor performer who cannot or will not improve.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
g. I am rewarded for providing high quality products and services to my customers (internal and/or external)	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
h. Recognition and rewards are based on performance in my work unit.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
i. In my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
j. Creativity and innovation are rewarded	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
k. Pay raises depend on how well employees perform their jobs	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
l. Promotions in my work unit are based on merit	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

C6. For each question, please indicate your level of satisfaction by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
a. How satisfied are you with the recognition you receive for doing a good job?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. How satisfied are you with your opportunity to get a better job in your organization?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Part D: Managers and Executives in My Organization

D1. For each question, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. The information collected in surveys and other forms of employee input is used to make improvements in my organization	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. In my organization, leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. Managers and executives demonstrate consistency between words and actions	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. Managers and executives are open and honest in sharing information with employees	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
f. I can express my point of view to management without fear of negative consequences.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
g. Managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
h. Managers review and evaluate the organization's progress toward meeting its goals and objectives.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
i. Managers/supervisors/team leaders work well with employees of different backgrounds	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D2. For each question, please indicate your level of satisfaction by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
a. How satisfied are you with the policies and practices of your senior managers?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management about what's going on in your organization?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Part E: Training and Development

E1. For each question, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Supervisors/team leaders in my work unit support employee development.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. My training needs are assessed.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

If you answered "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to question E1-c, continue with question E2.

If not, skip to question E3.

E2. How are your training needs assessed?
Mark all that apply.

- ❑ Informal discussion with my supervisor or team leader
- ❑ Formal discussion with my supervisor or team leader
- ❑ My supervisor or team leader decides what I need without discussing it with me
- ❑ Individual development planning
- ❑ Self-assessment questionnaire
- ❑ 360 or multi-source feedback (Several different groups of people who work with you assess your development needs such as peers, supervisor, subordinates, or customers)
- ❑ Other ***Specify:***_____
  _____
  _____

E3. How satisfied are you with the training you receive for your present job?
Please mark only one.

- ❑ Very Satisfied
- ❑ Satisfied
- ❑ Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
- ❑ Dissatisfied
- ❑ Very Dissatisfied

E4. How many times in the past 12 months have you had each of the following kinds of formal training that was paid for or otherwise provided by the Federal Government?

For our purposes, formal training includes classroom training, computer/web-delivered training, conferences and symposia, etc. Please count one "time" for each "class" or conference you took, even if it lasted for several days.

# times	Paid formal training
☐	a. Agency, bureau, division, or ***office-required training*** (such as computer security awareness, ethics, e-travel, etc.)
☐	b. Training about topics of ***general interest*** to government employees (such as new employee orientation, retirement planning, insurance benefits, etc.)
☐	c. Training that is closely related to the ***duties of your current job***
☐	d. Training that primarily prepares you for a promotion or ***movement to a different job***
☐	e. Training that has ***little or no real relation*** to your present or possible future job responsibilities

If you answered 1 or more to question E4-c, please continue with question E5.

Otherwise, skip to the Introduction to Question E10 on page 9.

E5. Please describe in a few words (no more than a sentence) the topic of the *most recent formal training closely related to the duties of your current job* you received that was paid for or otherwise provided by the Federal Government.

_____
_____
_____

E6. Which of the following *best* describes your reason for taking this training?
Please mark only one.

- ❑ It is required for employees in my occupation or specialty.
- ❑ My supervisor or other agency leader requested or required that I take it.
- ❑ I requested to take it because I thought it would increase my job-related abilities.
- ❑ I requested it because it would improve my ability to get a promotion or different job.
- ❑ I requested to take it for a different reason.
  Specify: _____
  _____
  _____

E7. Which of the following *best* describes the level of the knowledge, skill, or ability you expected to obtain from this training?
Please mark only one.

- ❑ **Introductory,** which assumes little or no prior background in what is taught.
- ❑ **Intermediate**, which assumes some background or ability and builds toward the advanced level.
- ❑ **Advanced,** which assumes attendees already have a great deal of background and/or ability in this area, and are fine-tuning their knowledge, skill, or ability.

E8. Which of the following persons or groups developed the content of this *most recent formal, job-related training?*
Please mark only one.

- ❑ An office or individual within your agency
- ❑ Another Federal agency or organization
- ❑ A state or local government organization
- ❑ A professional association or other nonprofit organization
- ❑ A private sector contractor or other commercial organization
- ❑ A college, university or other academic institution
- ❑ Don't know

E9. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about this *most recent job-related training*:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. I *enjoyed* this training	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. The training was *effective* in teaching what it was designed to teach	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. The training consisted mostly of things that I *did not know* before taking the training	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. What I have learned from this training either has, or will likely *improve my job performance*	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. *Obstacles* in my work setting that I cannot control prevent me from using the training to improve my job performance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
f. It would be *more effective* for employees to learn this type of knowledge, skill or ability *on the job*	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
g. It is very hard to develop proficiency in this area if you do not have natural talent or ability to begin with	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
h. Other employees in my work unit have had the same training in the past year	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
i. I would *recommend* this training to others who do the same kind of work I do	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Please consider the following possible situation.

Your agency is hiring more staff as a result of increased funding and an expansion of its mission. You have been asked to help hire a new employee who will be doing the same type and level of work that you do, but will be part of a different work team.

E10. Please describe in a few words or phrases the *most important knowledge, skill, or ability* this new employee needs to do his or her job well:

_____

_____

_____

_____

E11. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about this *most important skill or ability*:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. It can be learned by studying an appropriate manual, book, or web site	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. It can be learned from a formal training class or series of classes	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. It can be learned on the job through selected tasks or assignments	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. It can be learned through coaching or mentoring by an experienced co-worker	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. It is more of a personal characteristic or ability that cannot easily be learned	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
f. It is important to have during the first week on the job	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

E12. Consider *all* of the *knowledge, skills and abilities* (KSAs) the new employee needs for this job. Given that we want to be as efficient as possible, what percentages of these KSAs *should* come from each of the following sources? (Note: *The total should equal 100%.*)

	Percent
a. The employee should be able to do this ***before beginning work*** on the job	
b. The employee should be ***formally trained*** to do this while on the job	
c. The employee should ***"learn by doing"*** this while on the job	
d. The employee should be ***coached or mentored*** in this while on the job	
TOTAL	**100%**

Part F: Physical Work Environment and Safety

For each question, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Physical conditions (for example, noise level, temperature, lighting, cleanliness in the workplace) allow employees to perform their jobs well.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. Employees are protected from health and safety hazards on the job.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. My organization has prepared employees for potential security threats.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Part G: Merit System Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices

These questions pertain only to your experiences as a Federal employee. If you have been a Federal employee for less than two years, please answer the questions for the time you have been a Federal employee.

For each question, please place a check in the box under your response choice.

G1. Have you been treated fairly in the past 2 years in each area listed below?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Not Applicable
a. Career advancement	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. Awards	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. Training	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. Performance appraisals	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. Job assignments	❑	❑	❑	❑
f. Discipline	❑	❑	❑	❑
g. Pay	❑	❑	❑	❑

G2. In the past 2 years, have you been denied a job, promotion, pay increase, or other job benefit because of unlawful discrimination based on the following factors?

	Yes	No	Don't know
a. Race/national origin	❑	❑	❑
b. Sex	❑	❑	❑
c. Age	❑	❑	❑
d. Disability	❑	❑	❑
e. Religion	❑	❑	❑
f. Marital status	❑	❑	❑
g. Political affiliation	❑	❑	❑
h. Sexual orientation	❑	❑	❑
i. Off duty conduct	❑	❑	❑

G3. In the past 2 years, have you been…

	Yes	No	Don't know
a. Discouraged from competing for a job or promotion by an agency official	❑	❑	❑
b. Influenced by an agency official to withdraw from competition from a Federal job or promotion in order to help another person's chances of getting that job or promotion	❑	❑	❑
c. Denied a job or promotion because one of the selecting or recommending officials gave an unfair advantage to another person	❑	❑	❑
d. Denied a job or promotion because it was given to a relative of a selecting or recommending official	❑	❑	❑
e. Denied an award based on favoritism by the nominating or approving officials	❑	❑	❑
f. Pressured into participating in political activities	❑	❑	❑
g. Improperly pressured to take actions or make decisions based on political goals of others	❑	❑	❑

G4. In the past 2 years, do you feel you have been retaliated against or threatened with retaliation for taking any of the following actions? *Mark all that apply.*

	No	Yes, Experienced Retaliation	Yes, Threatened with Retaliation	Not Applicable
a. Disclosing health and safety dangers, unlawful behavior, and/or fraud, waste, and abuse	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. Exercising any formal appeal, complaint, or grievance right	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. Testifying for or otherwise assisting any individual in the exercise of whistleblowing, equal opportunity, or appeal rights	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. Refusing to obey an unlawful order	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. Reporting unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment	❑	❑	❑	❑
f. Disagreeing with management decisions	❑	❑	❑	❑

H. Demographic Questions

H1. How many years have you been a Federal civil service employee?

- ❑ Less than 1 year
- ❑ 1 to 5 years
- ❑ 6 to 10 years
- ❑ 11 to 15 years
- ❑ 16 to 20 years
- ❑ 21 to 25 years
- ❑ More than 25 years

H2. How many years of full-time work experience did you have before you began working for the Federal government in the civilian workforce?

- ❑ Less than 1 year
- ❑ 1 to 5 years
- ❑ 6 to 10 years
- ❑ 11 to 15 years
- ❑ 16 to 20 years
- ❑ 21 to 25 years
- ❑ More than 25 years

H3. Are you:

- ❑ Male
- ❑ Female

H4. Are you Hispanic or Latino?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

H5. Please select the racial category or categories with which you most closely identify. *Mark all that apply.*

- ❑ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ❑ Asian
- ❑ Black or African American
- ❑ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ❑ White

H6. What is your age?

- ❑ 25 or under
- ❑ 26–29
- ❑ 30–39
- ❑ 40–49
- ❑ 50–59
- ❑ 60 or older

H7. What is your annual base salary? Please round to the nearest thousand.

H8. What is your current education level?

- ❑ Less than a high school diploma
- ❑ High school, equivalent diploma, or GED
- ❑ Some college credits but no degree
- ❑ Associate's college degree
- ❑ Bachelor's college degree
- ❑ Graduate credits but no graduate degree
- ❑ Master's degree
- ❑ Professional degree (e.g., J.D, M.D., D.D.S., Ed.D.)
- ❑ Academic or scientific doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D.)

I. Questions for Supervisors, Managers, and Executives

All questions in this section are to be answered ONLY by supervisors, managers, and executives.

I1. How many years of experience did you have as a supervisor or manager *before* you joined the Federal civilian workforce? If you had less than 6 months experience, enter 0. If you had 6 months or more experience but less than 1 year, round up to 1 year.

I2. How many *total years* of supervisory experience do you have in the Federal civilian workforce? If you have less than 6 months experience, enter 0. If you have 6 months or more experience but less than 1 year, round up to 1 year.

I3. What do you see as the most important component of your job?

- ❑ Communicating and interacting with other supervisors and managers
- ❑ Communicating with internal and/or external customers
- ❑ Doing my own technical work
- ❑ Supervising my employees (reviewing work, providing feedback, discussing their assignments, development, or performance with them, etc.)
- ❑ Creating a work unit or organization equipped to successfully meet the challenges of today and tomorrow through strategic hiring, development, management, and retention
- ❑ Completing administrative work
- ❑ Other *Specify:* _____

I4. What is the most satisfying part of your job?

- ❑ Communicating and interacting with other supervisors and managers
- ❑ Communicating with internal and/or external customers
- ❑ Doing my own technical work
- ❑ Supervising my employees (reviewing work, providing feedback, discussing their assignments, development, or performance with them, etc.)
- ❑ Creating a work unit or organization equipped to successfully meet the challenges of today and tomorrow through strategic hiring, development, management, and retention
- ❑ Completing administrative work
- ❑ Other *Specify:* _____

I5. Approximately what percentage of your time is devoted to each of the following activities? (Note: *The total should equal 100%.*)

Activity	% of Time
a. Communicating and interacting with other supervisors and managers	
b. Communicating with internal and/or external customers	
c. Doing my own technical work	
d. Supervising my employees (reviewing work, providing feedback, discussing their assignments, development, or performance with them, etc.)	
e. Creating a work unit or organization equipped to successfully meet the challenges of today and tomorrow through strategic hiring, development, management, and retention	
f. Completing administrative work	
e. Other *Specify:* _____	
TOTAL	**100%**

I6. Do you have all the authority you need to fulfill your supervisory responsibilities?

- ❑ No
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Not sure

I7. When do *you typically* review your employees' work? ***Please select only one response.***

- ❑ I don't typically review my employees' work
- ❑ Usually only when a problem arises
- ❑ Usually only when an employee requests my review
- ❑ When the customer is especially important or demanding or the work has political implications
- ❑ At the completion of a project or product milestone
- ❑ At the full completion of a project or product
- ❑ Routinely review my employees' work on a regular basis
- ❑ Other *Specify:* _____

If you selected "Routinely review my employees work" please continue with question I7A. Otherwise, skip to question I8.

I7A. How often do you *routinely* review your employees' work on a regular basis?

- ❑ Daily
- ❑ Weekly
- ❑ Every two weeks
- ❑ Monthly
- ❑ Quarterly
- ❑ Twice per year
- ❑ Annually

I8. When do you routinely make notes about your employees' work and/or performance, e.g., recording achievements, positive or negative incidents or behaviors, progress, development needs, etc? ***Mark all that apply.***

- ❑ I don't record my employees' performance
- ❑ I don't have a routine but I sometimes record my employees' performance
- ❑ At the completion of project milestones
- ❑ At the full completion of a project
- ❑ When a positive or negative incident occurs
- ❑ During or following individual meetings or discussions with employees
- ❑ At mid-year performance appraisal time
- ❑ At year-end performance appraisal time
- ❑ On a time-based schedule I set. **How often?**
  - ❑ Daily
  - ❑ Weekly
  - ❑ Every two weeks
  - ❑ Monthly
  - ❑ Quarterly
  - ❑ Twice per year
  - ❑ Annually

I9. From whom do you collect feedback to help you determine how well an employee is performing? ***Mark all that apply.***

- ❑ Employee's team leader
- ❑ Internal customers of the employee
- ❑ External customers of the employee
- ❑ Employee's peers
- ❑ Employee's subordinates
- ❑ Employee's suppliers, vendors, or contractors
- ❑ Other supervisors or managers who are not the employee's customers
- ❑ Other than the above
- ❑ I don't collect feedback from others

I10. Organizations sometimes include employees who are performing at or just above minimum standards but who could perform better if they invested more effort in their work. Consider the last time you directly supervised an employee of this type. What actions did you take?

- ❑ I have not yet had experience with this type of employee ➔ *Skip to Question I11*
- ❑ I have had experience with this type of employee, but I did not take any special actions to help the employee improve ➔ *Skip to Question I11*

If you have had experience with this type of employee and took actions to help the employee improve, for each action listed below please indicate:

Step 1. If you took that action, and

Step 2. For each action you took, the impact of that action on the employee's performance

Action (✓)		Improved	Improved & Then Regressed	No Change	Worsened	Transferred	Resigned	Too Soon to Tell	Don't Know
☐	a. Discussed with the employee why he or she was not performing to his or her potential	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	b. Worked with the employee to develop and implement an informal improvement plan	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	c. Discussed with the employee the benefits to him or her of improving	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	d. Explained to the employee how his or her performance affects the performance rating	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	e. Monitored the employee's work more closely than other employees' work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	f. Provided frequent feedback and/or coaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	g. Paired the employee with another employee	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	h. Reduced the employee's workload or gave easier assignments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	i. Increased the employee's workload or gave more difficult assignments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	j. Encouraged the employee to transfer to another work unit where he or she could be more successful.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	k. Other – *Please specify:* _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

_____

_____

I11. Some organizations include employees who are performing at or just above minimum standards but who could perform better if they improved in specific knowledge, skills, abilities, personal characteristics or their interactions with others. Consider the last time you directly supervised an employee of this type. What actions did you take?

- ❑ I have not yet had experience with this type of employee ➔ *Skip to Question I12*
- ❑ I have had experience with this type of employee, but I did not take any special actions to help the employee improve ➔ *Skip to Question I12*

If you have had experience with this type of employee and took actions to help the employee improve, for each action listed below please indicate:

Step 1. If you took that action, and

Step 2. For each action you took, the impact of that action on the employee's performance

Action (✓)		Improved	Improved & Then Regressed	No Change	Worsened	Transferred	Resigned	Too Soon to Tell	Don't Know
❑	a. Worked with the employee to develop and implement an informal improvement plan	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	b. Monitored the employee's work more closely than other employees' work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	c. Provided frequent feedback and coaching	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	d. Paired the employee with another employee who is highly skilled in the employee's weak areas	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	e. Re-assigned the employee to work more closely matched with abilities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	f. Provided the employee with training or on-the-job development opportunities to address weaker areas.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	g. Encouraged the employee to transfer to another work unit where he or she could be more successful	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	h. Other – *Please specify:* _____	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

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I12. Some organizations include employees who are poor performers, i.e., their performance is below minimum standards. Consider the last time you directly supervised an employee of this type. What actions did you take?

- ❑ I have not yet had experience with this type of employee ➔ *Skip to Question I 13*
- ❑ I have had experience with this type of employee, but I did not take any special actions to help the employee improve ➔ *Skip to Question I 13*

If you have had experience with this type of employee and took actions to help the employee improve, for each action listed below please indicate:

Step 1. If you took that action, and

Step 2. For each action you took, the impact of that action on the employee's performance

Action (✓)		Improved	Improved & Then Regressed	No Change	Worsened	Transferred	Resigned	Too Soon to Tell	Don't Know
❑	a. Met frequently with the employee to provide feedback and coaching	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	b. Closely monitored the employee's work.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	c. Discussed with the employee the possible reasons for poor performance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	d. Asked the employee how I could help and provided appropriate help	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	e. Communicated expectations and provided direction orally	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	f. Communicated expectations and provided direction through a written memo	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	g. Discussed with the employee possible negative consequences for continued inadequate performance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	h. Changed the employee's work assignments	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	i. Worked with the employee to develop an informal plan for improvement	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	j. Prepared a formal Performance Improvement Plan.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	k. Paired the person with a good performer as a guide or mentor	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	l. Gave the employee a low performance appraisal rating	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	m. Transferred the employee to a different job, team, or work unit	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	n. Took disciplinary action such as suspension or removal	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	o. I waited for the opportunity to use conduct issues to address inadequate performance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
❑	p. Other – *Please specify:* _____	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

_____

_____

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I13. To which group of your employees do you tend to provide the most feedback and coaching or mentoring?

- ❑ Top performers
- ❑ Good performers
- ❑ Marginal performers
- ❑ Low performers

I14. For each question, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement by placing a check in the box under your response choice.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. I support my employees' need to balance work and family issues	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. I communicate high performance expectations to my employees	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. I talk with my employees or assist them when they need help	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. I explain the reasons for work changes to my employees before they take place	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. Employees in my work unit or organization can express their point of view to me without fear of negative consequences	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

I15. How would you rate your overall performance as a supervisor?

- ❑ Very good
- ❑ Good
- ❑ Fair
- ❑ Poor
- ❑ Very Poor

I16. Did you receive formal supervisory training prior to or during your first year as a supervisor?

- ❑ No ➔ *Skip to Item I 19*
- ❑ Yes

I17. What were the topics of the formal supervisory training you received prior to and during your first year as a supervisor? *Mark all that apply.*

- ❑ Conducting team or work unit meetings
- ❑ Developing performance goals and standards for your employees
- ❑ Making work assignments
- ❑ Monitoring or reviewing employee work and progress
- ❑ Documenting employee performance (ongoing for all employees)
- ❑ Preparing performance appraisals
- ❑ Providing corrective feedback and coaching
- ❑ Providing positive feedback and coaching
- ❑ Conducting performance discussions
- ❑ Managing poor performers
- ❑ Helping employees improve their performance (all employees, not just poor performers)
- ❑ Employee development planning and implementation
- ❑ Improving the productivity or effectiveness of your work unit
- ❑ Workforce planning
- ❑ Helping employees balance work and personal lives
- ❑ Using the probationary period as the final stage of the selection process
- ❑ Conflict management
- ❑ Other *Describe:* _____

_____

_____

I18. How many total hours of supervisory training did you participate in prior to and during your first year as a supervisor? ***(8 hours equals 1 day)***

- ❑ Less than one day
- ❑ 1 to 2 days
- ❑ 3 to 4 days
- ❑ 1 week
- ❑ 2 weeks
- ❑ More than 2 weeks

I19. What types of informal development did you participate in to help you build your supervisory knowledge, skills, and abilities during your first year as a supervisor? ***Mark all that apply.***

- ❑ Self-study of books, magazines, journals, web sites, or other materials
- ❑ Coaching and/or feedback from my manager
- ❑ Coaching or advice from other supervisors or a mentor
- ❑ Feedback from my employees
- ❑ 360 or multi-source feedback (Several different groups of people who work with me such as peers, supervisor, subordinates, or customers provide feedback)
- ❑ Discussions with friends and family members
- ❑ Participation in a professional association
- ❑ Networking
- ❑ Activities outside of work, e.g., community, church, or other volunteer activities
- ❑ None
- ❑ Other ***Describe:*** _____

_____

_____

I20. What type of supervisory training do you wish you had received early in your career as a supervisor but did not? Please list one to five topics.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

I21. According to Federal regulation, all supervisors must serve a one-year probationary period when they first become supervisors. When you first became a supervisor, were you informed that you would be on probation for a year?

- ❑ No
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Don't remember

I22. Was your performance during your probationary period as a supervisor actually used to decide if you should continue in a supervisory role?

- ❑ No
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ Don't know

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY!

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