



Managing for Engagement — Communication, Connection, and Courage

Employee engagement refers to a heightened connection between an employee and the work, the organization, or the people they work for or with. In 2008, the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) report *The Power of Federal Employee Engagement* discussed the strong effect of employment engagement on Federal agency performance. This 2009 report discusses what Federal leaders can do to increase engagement, drawing on MSPB's 2007 Merit Principles Survey and previous research. The report outlines six engagement drivers and recommends actions to promote the performance management behaviors and practices necessary to engagement.

Engagement Driver 1: Pride in Work and the Agency

This was an area of strength. Governmentwide, 91 percent of employees agreed that their work was important, and 74 percent of employees would recommend their agency as a place to work.

Engagement Driver 2: Effective Leadership

Here, results were mixed. Although 67 percent of employees agreed that their supervisor was doing a good job, views of senior leadership were markedly less positive. Notably, only 41 percent of nonsupervisory employees believed that they could express their opinions to higher management without fear of repercussions.

Engagement Driver 3: Opportunity to Perform Well

About two-thirds of employees believed their talents are used well in the workplace. However, many employees believed that meetings with supervisors to share information and discuss work issues were too infrequent, which can erode employee trust.

Engagement Driver 4: Positive Work Environment

Most employees reported a positive and collaborative work environment. For example, 81 percent of employees agreed that their supervisor treats them with respect. Yet many employees, particularly those in front-line positions, thought that leaders could make better use of employee insights to improve work processes and the work environment.

Engagement Driver 5: Appropriate Recognition

Only half of employees believed that recognition is linked to performance. That is a substantial improvement over MSPB survey results from the 1980s and 1990s—but also shows that many Federal agencies still do not adequately prepare supervisors to evaluate and recognize employee performance.

Engagement Driver 6: Prospect for Professional Growth

In this area, more investment is needed. Only 46 percent of employees indicated their training needs had been assessed, and only 55 percent were satisfied with the job training they had received.

Key Recommendations

For **employees**—

- Actively manage your performance.
- Seek continuous learning.
- Prepare carefully for performance discussions.

For **leaders** at all levels—

- Hire with care—and use the probationary period.
- Cultivate good working relationships with employees.
- Provide regular and constructive feedback.
- Be a model in requesting and acting on feedback.
- Provide **all** employees opportunities to grow.
- Hold **all** employees accountable for their performance.

For **agencies**—

- Make constructive use of employee surveys and input.
- Communicate openly and often to build trust.
- Use onboarding to engage new employees.
- Link recognition and rewards to performance.
- Select supervisors to manage performance—then hold them accountable.
- Give supervisors sufficient resources, training, and management support.