

Federal Employee Engagement: The Motivating Potential of Job Characteristics and Rewards

Research
Highlights



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Motivation drives *what* employees do, *how* they do it, how *hard* they will try, and how *long* they will persist in a given endeavor. In our 2010 Merit Principles Survey, we asked Federal employees about the motivating aspects of their jobs and rewards.

Over 70 percent of respondents agreed that they felt highly motivated in their work. However, the extent to which their jobs had characteristics that were motivating varied greatly. Eighty-five percent of respondents said that their job had skill variety, 84 percent reported that their tasks were significant, 74 percent reported having autonomy in the performance of their duties, and 74 percent reported receiving feedback about their performance either from the work itself or from others. In contrast, only 58 percent reported that their work had “task identity”—the ability to complete a single piece of work from end to end. Task identity is important because a job that allows employees to complete entire tasks will generally be judged as more meaningful, and the resulting sense of ownership can increase motivation and engagement.

When asked which of 11 rewards were most important to them in terms of seeking out and continuing employment with their organization, the number one reward identified by Federal employees was the personal satisfaction they received (95% agreement). In contrast, awards and bonuses was ranked a distant ninth (78% agreement).



In an era of tight fiscal constraints, which can limit opportunities for advancement and reduce job security, it is especially important for agencies to communicate to employees that they are appreciated and that their work contributes to the public good. Agencies must also assure that available rewards, both monetary and nonmonetary, reinforce desired behaviors and performance. However, only 23 percent of respondents reported that they perceived a strong link between effort, job performance, and their receipt of a reward.

We recommend that Federal agencies and managers, to the greatest extent practical—
(1) examine job characteristics and improve them when possible; (2) assign a variety of tasks; (3) structure tasks to maximize employees’ ownership of the result; (4) provide timely feedback; (5) communicate to employees that their employees’ work is valuable and their efforts are appreciated; and (6) provide rewards fairly and objectively.

For the full report, including an in-depth discussion of how job characteristics and rewards can contribute to employee motivation, please visit www.mspb.gov/studies.