Making the Right Connections: Targeting the Best Competencies for Training
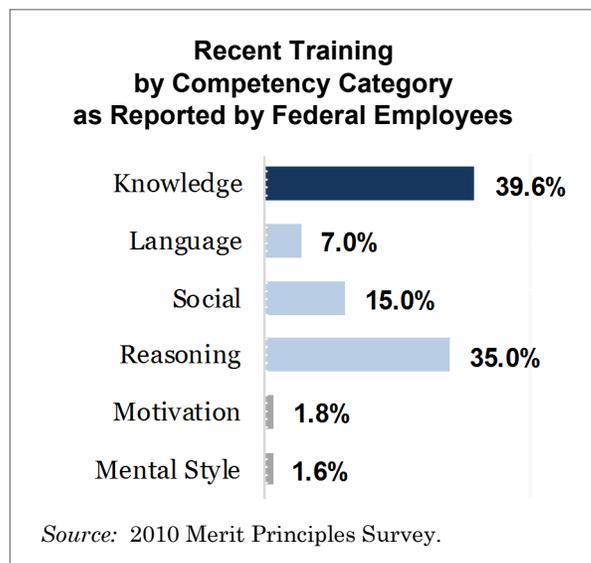
Federal employees need a variety of competencies to successfully perform their jobs and support their agencies' missions. Training is important in competency development. However, research and experience suggest that some competencies may be more difficult to develop than others. This February 2011 report contrasts employee perceptions of the trainability of job-relevant competencies with research findings about their actual trainability. The results should help Federal agencies and employees avoid training that targets less trainable competencies and is therefore less likely to succeed.

We asked Federal employees about their training needs and most recent training and assigned their responses to one of six competency categories, shown in the table. Survey data indicates that Federal employee beliefs and training activities are generally consistent with research findings. However, some employees may avoid training that would help them or seek training that might prove frustrating and unsuccessful because of misperceptions about the trainability of some competencies.

Competency Categories and Trainability	
• Knowledge	**Highly** Trainable
• Language • Social • Reasoning	**Moderately** Trainable
• Motivation • Mental Style	**Less** Trainable

Findings include—

- As illustrated, about 40% of employees sought training for highly trainable competencies; 57% for moderately trainable competencies; and 3% for less trainable competencies.

- Employees with formal career development plans are less likely to target less trainable competencies. Fewer than half of Federal employees have career development plans.

- Training pretests and screening can reduce frustration and waste that result when employees lack prior learning or ability.

- Training for less trainable competencies is sometimes imposed as a requirement by agencies or recommended by other employees. This can encourage attendance of training that is unlikely to improve its targeted competencies.

**Recent Training
by Competency Category
as Reported by Federal Employees**

Knowledge	**39.6%**
Language	**7.0%**
Social	**15.0%**
Reasoning	**35.0%**
Motivation	**1.8%**
Mental Style	**1.6%**

Source: 2010 Merit Principles Survey.

MSPB recommends that agencies: (1) increase employee career development planning; (2) consider trainability in review of employee training requests; and (3) increase use of pre-training preparedness testing, prerequisite requirements, and realistic previews of what training covers.