

MERIT PRINCIPLES SURVEY 2005

# **ACCOMPLISHING OUR MISSION**

**Results of the Merit Principles Survey 2005**



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

February 2007

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

Dear Sirs:

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, "Accomplishing Our Mission: Results of the Merit Principles Survey 2005."

We administered the Merit Principles Survey 2005 to determine how successful Federal agencies are at achieving their missions as they attempt to build a well-qualified workforce, overcome barriers to mission accomplishment, and preserve individual and organization success through rewards, recognition, and retention. We found that Federal employees generally believe that they are managed well, have jobs that they like, and are highly motivated by the opportunity to help their agencies succeed.

This report also explores several challenges that agencies face in the workplace. For example, hiring officials are often not satisfied with the applicant pool they must draw from to fill Federal job openings. Employees already on the job would like additional training to accomplish their jobs at a higher level of performance. Nonsupervisory employees feel uninformed about performance evaluation, organizational changes, and other issues at times.

The importance of trust between employees and their supervisors is a primary finding of this report. Agencies, supervisors, and employees should continue to strengthen the working relationship between supervisors and their employees. Ensuring that the lines of communication are open and used are keys to maintaining this trust.

I believe you will find this report useful as you continue your efforts to improve the management and performance of the Federal civil service.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Neil A. G. McPhie".

Neil A. G. McPhie



# **Accomplishing Our Mission:**

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A Report to the President and the Congress of the United States  
by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board



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**Annette Butler**

**Doug Nierle**



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# Executive Summary

**T**he U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) is responsible for assessing the health of Federal merit systems to ensure they adhere to the Federal merit system principles and do not result in prohibited personnel practices. As part of this responsibility, MSPB conducts the periodic Merit Principles Survey to gauge the perspectives of nonsupervisory and supervisory employees regarding working conditions, job satisfaction, and the quality of their coworkers and supervisors. This report discusses the views of Federal employees provided in response to the Merit Principles Survey 2005 (MPS 2005).

*The MPS 2005 specifically explored the performance of the Federal workforce. In particular, we wanted to know how successful agencies are at achieving their mission, particularly in terms of preparing for success by assembling a well-qualified workforce, overcoming barriers to successful mission accomplishment, and preserving success through rewards, recognition, and retention. This report summarizes the responses of 36,926 Federal employees who completed the mostly online survey as part of a randomly drawn, representative sample of the 1.8 million full-time permanent members of the Federal workforce. The results confirm that employees at all levels are dedicated to ensuring that their agencies achieve their missions, but are concerned about how the Federal Government can maintain a dedicated, qualified workforce. We also found continuing high job satisfaction despite perceptions of less organizational stability and fear of changes in the pay system.*

## Findings

**Employees are committed.** We found that Federal employees, whether nonsupervisory or supervisory, are highly committed to the missions of their agencies and work to further those missions. Employees understand the missions of their agencies (95 percent) and believe that their agency's mission is important (95 percent). On an individual level, employees understand how their work contributes to the agency's overall mission (92 percent) and find the work they do personally meaningful (88 percent).

**Agencies are successful.** We asked employees to evaluate how successful their agency is in accomplishing its mission. A large majority (76 percent) believe their agency accomplishes its mission successfully and an equal percentage (76 percent) report that their agency produces high-quality products and services for the public.

**The current workforce has the necessary skills.** Three-quarters of our survey participants believe that their agency's workforce has the knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish its mission.

**There are barriers to recruiting a high-quality workforce.** Over three-quarters of all employees (76 percent) would recommend the Government as a place to work. Despite this glowing endorsement, first-line supervisors and other managers still indicate that they have problems recruiting highly qualified applicants. These problems may be due to insufficient recruitment strategies or incentives, the slowness of the hiring process, or the use of inadequate assessment instruments, and agencies should examine them further.

**Employees would like more training.**<sup>1</sup> Although a majority of survey participants report that they receive sufficient training to do their jobs (63 percent), a sizable minority (48 percent) would like additional training to improve their job performance.

**There is an information gap between nonsupervisory employees and supervisors.** Nonsupervisory employees do not believe they are as well informed as their supervisors are, particularly about issues surrounding performance.

**Employees generally believe they are treated fairly in employment matters.** Most survey participants (60 percent) believe their agency treats them fairly in matters related to employment. Additionally, employees report fewer prohibited personnel practices during the 2 years preceding the survey than at any other time in the last 2 decades.

**There is a moderate level of workplace conflict in the Federal Government.** Nearly half of the supervisory participants report dealing with at least one serious workplace conflict during the past year, and more than one-third of employees had experienced a serious workplace conflict during the past 2 years. Fortunately, the data speak highly of supervisor efforts to clarify and resolve conflicts through open communication.

**Employees trust their supervisors.** Fair treatment and successful communication both build trust—and their absence creates distrust and a host of accompanying problems. There is clear evidence that employees tend to trust their immediate supervisors but not necessarily their upper level management.

**Employees are satisfied and secure.** Job security and satisfaction are important factors to employee retention. Currently, a vast majority of Federal employees are satisfied with their work and feel secure, perceiving that their jobs are stable.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "employees" refers to both nonsupervisory and supervisory employees unless otherwise noted.

**Employees are satisfied with pay but not rewards.** Employees value recognition for a job well done. In general, a majority of employees are satisfied with the pay they receive (60 percent) but not with the recognition and rewards granted to them (39 percent). And while they support the concept of performance-based pay, they are unsure about how well it can be implemented in the Federal sector.

**Employees may be leaving.** Nearly a quarter of survey participants said they were likely to leave their agency in the next year. Of those planning to leave, almost a third planned to retire, just over a third planned to move to another Federal job, and a small number (5 percent) planned to resign from Government employment. The rest were unsure of their plans. Employees planning to leave were primarily concerned with the opportunity to earn more money and increased opportunities for career advancement.

## Recommendations

While the MPS 2005 results indicate that the Federal Government does a fairly good job of managing its workforce in adherence to the merit system principles, there are several areas in which agencies can improve.

1. Because the data indicate that difficulty in recruiting highly qualified applicants is a barrier to preparing the workforce to achieve its mission, agencies need to identify why they may not be reaching a high-quality applicant pool through their recruitment and selection procedures.
2. Employees would like more training, but their supervisors cannot always justify or fund the training. Therefore, supervisors and their employees should work together to: identify training needs that will support the organization's mission and prioritize the organization's training activities accordingly. One way to accomplish these goals is to institute career development plans, as appropriate.
3. A primary finding throughout this report is the importance of trust between employees and their first-line supervisors. Therefore, agencies, supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees should work together to continue strengthening the trust and working relationship between supervisors and their employees. Ensuring that the lines of communication are not only open but also used and that employees are comfortable talking with their supervisors are key to building this trust and should strengthen supervisors' ability to resolve conflicts by working with their employees.
4. Although there has been significant progress in achieving fair and equitable treatment of employees in the Federal workplace, agencies must remain vigilant. They must continue to educate managers and all other employees in proper workplace behavior, and to monitor adherence to merit system principles and prevention of prohibited personnel practices.

## Executive Summary

5. Agencies must create a culture in which employees trust that their performance will be accurately rated, that they will be treated fairly, and that adequate resources are available to reward and recognize them.
6. Agencies should implement workforce planning strategies that utilize recruitment, retention, and training methods to build and sustain a high-quality workforce. This is especially essential in the many agencies whose supervisors report too few high-quality applicants for their open positions.

Instituting these recommendations should help agencies improve their ability to accomplish their individual missions by consciously committing to success, preparing for it by attracting and developing the right talent, overcoming obstacles to success, and preserving the success that is achieved.

# Introduction

The Merit Systems Protection Board has been entrusted with the statutory responsibility to study the hiring, development, and management of Federal civilian employees to ensure that agencies follow the Federal merit principles and do not allow prohibited personnel practices to occur. MSPB's studies examine the "health" of Federal merit systems to ensure that employees are managed fairly, efficiently, and effectively. For the past two decades, MSPB has conducted periodic Governmentwide Merit Principles Surveys of Federal employees to solicit their perceptions of their jobs, work environment, supervisors, and agencies. MSPB uses the survey results to identify areas of success and areas that require improvement to assist Federal leaders in building and sustaining a highly qualified and productive Federal workforce through adherence to the merit system principles. This report presents the key findings from the Merit Principles Survey administered in 2005 (MPS 2005).

## The Merit Principles Survey 2005 Instrument

The MPS 2005 consisted of 69 questions, with 59 to be answered by all employees and 10 to be answered only by supervisory employees. Many of the questions were comprised of multiple subparts. Of the 69 questions, 11 sought demographic information pertaining to the employee's agency affiliation, years of Federal service, salary, age, gender, and other characteristics. The remaining questions queried employees on the following topics:

- Agency mission and work environment
- Employee's own job
- Employee's work unit
- Job performance standards and appraisal
- Pay and rewards
- Fairness
- Employee's supervisor
- Training
- Career plans
- Supervisors' perspective at all levels (team leaders, first-line supervisors, upper managers, and executives)

We included many questions used in previous MSPB surveys to allow us to track changes over time. The remaining questions were newly developed to provide insight into how Federal agencies manage their employees to best accomplish their missions and other areas of concern or special interest to the Federal workforce. The questions were reviewed by human resources leaders in several agencies, and we pilot tested and revised the entire survey as needed before administration.

## The Administration of the Survey

The MPS 2005 was completed by employees during the summer and fall of 2005. It was the first MPS administered online via the World Wide Web. MSPB values the collaboration of agency leaders, Human Resource Directors, and Chief Human Capital Officers who identified points of contact to work with us and who encouraged employees to participate. Agency information technology personnel provided invaluable help to ensure that agency SPAM defenses, firewalls, and other security mechanisms were configured to allow employees to access the MPS 2005 Web site from their desktop computers.

## Employee Participation

Twenty-four Federal agencies participated in the survey. These agencies are listed in Appendix B. Within each of the 24 participating agencies, MSPB selected a representative, random sample of full-time, permanent, nonseasonal employees in each subagency or major division to participate in the survey. We selected a total of about 74,000 employees to participate.

For many questions, we compared the responses of nonsupervisors to supervisors. Our previous reports as well as other research about Federal employees suggest that nonsupervisory and supervisory employees' job experiences, perceptions, and views of their roles in Government service often differ significantly. To fulfill our responsibilities it is an important part of MSPB's strategy to detect these differences and assess their implications for the effective and efficient management of the Federal workforce. Therefore, we ensured that our sample of employees selected for participation included appropriate numbers of nonsupervisory and supervisory employees. "Supervisors" include team leaders, first-line supervisors, managers, and executives.

The employees selected to participate in the survey were sent invitations via an e-mail message with an accompanying link to the survey Web site. Employees in four agencies that did not have easily configurable Web or e-mail access were sent paper invitations and survey packets via postal mail. A total of 36,926 employees completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of approximately 50 percent.

## Content and Organization of this Report

This report reviews a number of key findings from the Merit Principles Survey 2005. Additional survey results will be presented in forthcoming reports and in our *Issues of Merit* newsletter. The results presented here are organized around four elements essential to managing the Federal workforce to achieve organizational goals. The four elements are:

1. *Committing the Agency to Success.* This section discusses employees' understanding of the mission of their agency and their contributions to achieving the mission as well as the agency's need to ensure that all employees understand and support the mission.
2. *Preparing for Success.* This section looks at whether employees believe their agencies are using effective recruiting and training practices.
3. *Overcoming Barriers to Success.* Here we discuss how employees perceive they are treated in the workplace, including any violation of merit principles.
4. *Preserving Success.* Finally, we examine survey participants' views of agencies' efforts to retain valuable employees.

The report closes with our conclusions and recommendations for agencies as they face the ongoing challenge of managing their employees to continuously improve agency performance.

## Presentation of the Results

**Definitions.** Throughout this report, we will use the following definitions for terms used:

- ❑ “Participants” or “survey participants” refers to all employees who responded to the question, including nonsupervisory employees, team leaders, first-line supervisors, higher level managers, and executives;
- ❑ “Employees” or “employee” refers to the entire Federal workforce;
- ❑ “Nonsupervisors” or “nonsupervisory employees” refers to those survey participants who do not have any supervisory responsibilities;
- ❑ “Supervisors” refers to all who have responsibility for employee performance appraisals and leave, from first-line supervisors to higher level managers and executives;
- ❑ “Team leaders” refers to those who do not have official supervisory responsibilities or conduct performance appraisals, but provide employees with day-to-day guidance in work projects.
- ❑ “Managers” refers to those who supervise one or more supervisors; and
- ❑ “Executives” are members of the Senior Executive Service or its equivalent.

**Response Categories.** Many survey questions offered five response choices, such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. We reported the results of such questions by combining the first two choices as if they were a single response and the last two choices as if they were a single response. For example, to the question “I understand my agency mission,” participants who chose either the Strongly Agree or Agree were reported as understanding their agency’s mission. The participants who chose Disagree or Strongly Disagree were considered to not understand their agency’s mission. This method helps us to categorize our responses either positively or negatively, assisting us in analyzing and clearly communicating the results.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The decision to collapse or “recode” five response categories into three was made for the purpose and audience of the current report. The MPS 2005 data which will be archived with the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) will serve the needs of many researchers with different purposes and perhaps different audiences. MSPB has included both the collapsed, three-valued data and the original five-valued data in this archive.

# Committing the Agency to Success

**A**s public servants, Federal employees are entrusted with the responsibility of serving the public good by helping their agency accomplish its organizational mission. Newly appointed Federal employees formally swear an oath to serve the interests of their Nation to the best of their ability. This ability depends on both the employees' personal commitment to their agency and the competencies they bring to support accomplishing its mission. In turn, the agency must consciously make a commitment to successful mission accomplishment by clearly communicating its mission, goals, and strategies to employees and providing employees with inspirational leadership, clear performance standards, a safe and comfortable work environment, and the tools, information, and other resources needed to perform effectively.

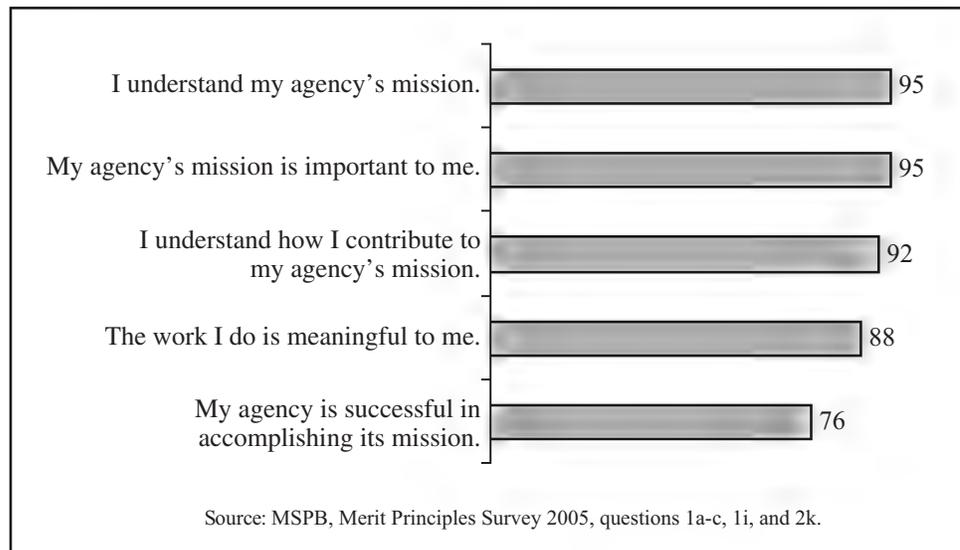
In this section of the report we look at survey participants' understanding of their agency's mission, their contribution to that mission, and their perceptions of the performance of their agency and work units. Work units are the group of people with whom an employee works on a regular basis; typically all work for the same immediate supervisor. A work unit may include multiple teams, each led by an individual team leader.

## Understanding Agency Mission

Our survey results show that Federal agencies have been very successful in communicating both their missions and their employees' roles in achieving those missions. Survey questions about agency mission produced the highest rates of agreement on the Merit Principles Survey 2005.

**Figure 1** presents the results of several questions about agency mission. Some 95 percent of survey participants understand the mission of their agencies and 95 percent believe that their agency's mission is important. On an individual level, participants also understand how their work contributes to the agency's overall mission (92 percent) and find the work they do personally meaningful (88 percent).

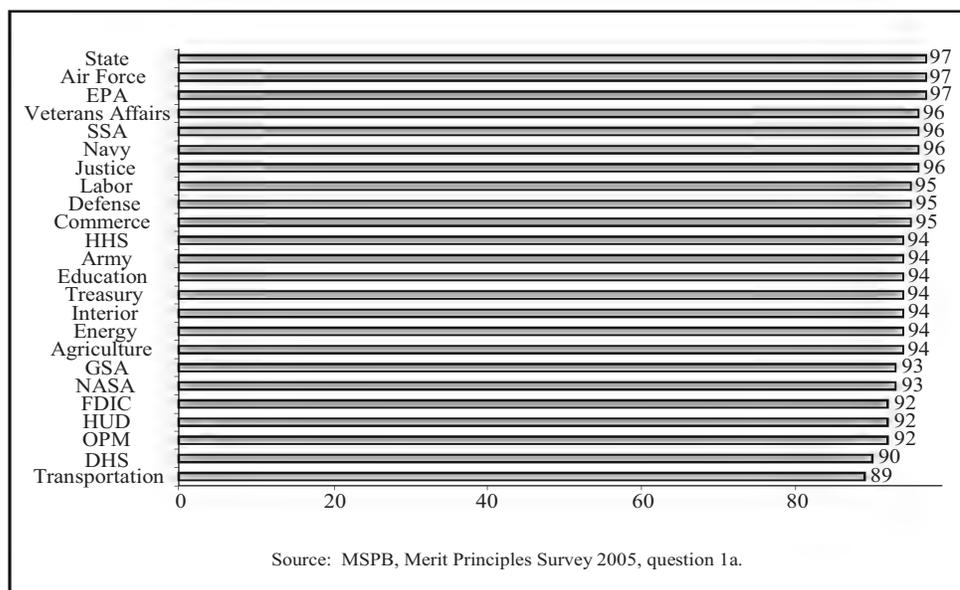
**Figure 1. Percent of participants indicating agreement with the listed statements about agency mission and personal contributions to it**



There is little variation in the high levels of understanding of organizational mission across different types of Federal employees. For example, the percentage of nonsupervisory employees who regard their agency's mission as important to them (94 percent) is close to the percentage of supervisors who do so (98 percent).

There are moderate differences in the understanding of organizational mission among participants working in different agencies, with the percentages of all employees who say they understand their agency's mission varying from 89 percent through 97 percent as depicted in **Figure 2**.

**Figure 2. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement "I understand my agency's mission," by agency**



It is possible that the lower reported understanding of agency mission in some agencies is due to less effective communication from leadership or it may be due to recent or current reorganizations at the time the survey was completed. Reorganizations have apparently been common throughout the Government in recent years. In fact, just over a third of our survey participants (37 percent) report that their agency's organizational structure remained stable over the 2 years preceding the survey. A recently restructured organization is still defining its mission and communicating the nature of that mission to its employees. Even employees who do not change jobs in such a reorganization can be expected to be somewhat unsure that their mission remains the same. A comparison of the degree to which agency mission is understood in recently restructured organizations (92 percent) versus relatively stable organizations (98 percent) provides some support for this assertion.

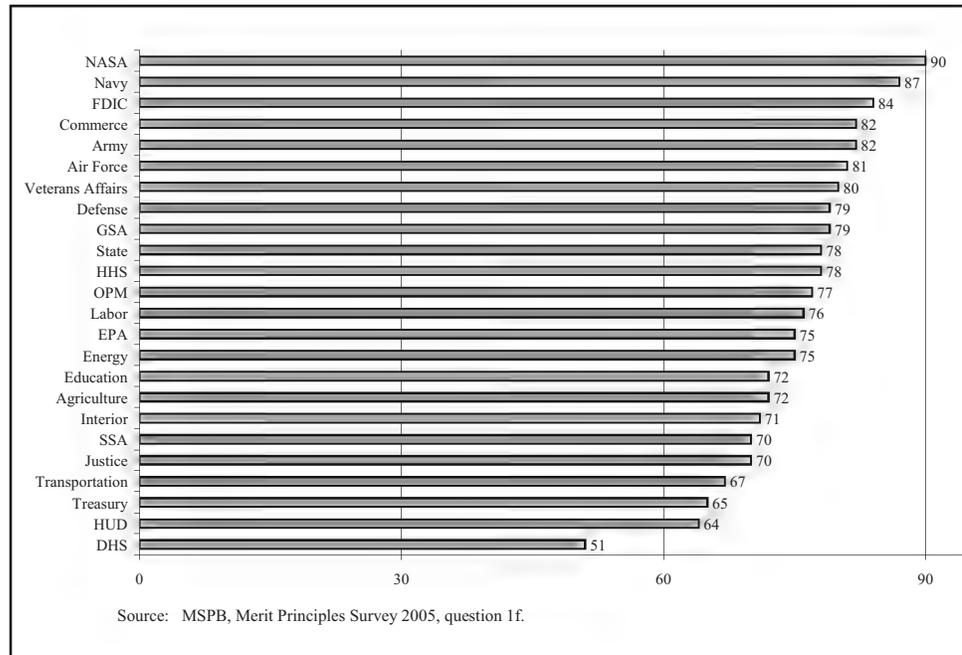
Because work requirements and the work force itself continue to change rapidly, reorganizations may even be required more frequently in the present and future than they have been in the past. When they are going to occur, it is important for agencies to create and implement a detailed change management and communication plan that specifies the methods, message content, and timing for keeping employees informed of and involved in management actions before, during, and after the reorganization. It is essential for the plan to require agencies to fully and candidly explain how the reorganization will affect employees at all levels and what roles employees will have in ensuring a smooth transition to the revised organization. Employees are much more likely to retain, and even enhance, their understanding of their agency's mission during and after a reorganization when they are treated as collaborative partners in change rather than as recipients of change.

## **Accomplishment of Agency Mission**

The MPS 2005 also asked participants to evaluate how successful their agency is in accomplishing its mission. A large majority of participants (76 percent) report that their agency accomplishes its mission successfully, with the range of responses varying by agency from 61 percent to 84 percent.

A large percentage of participants (76 percent) also report that their agency produces high-quality products and services for the public. However, responses varied widely among agencies, with 90 percent of participants in the highest ranking agency stating that their agency provides high-quality products and services, but only 51 percent of participants in the lowest ranking agency doing so. These results are summarized by agency in **Figure 3**. Survey data also show that four-fifths (80 percent) of the survey participants believe that their own work units produce high-quality products and services, with agreement ranging from 65 percent to 87 percent by agency.

**Figure 3. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “My agency produces high quality products and services,” by agency**



The wide disparity that Figure 3 depicts among the 24 participating agencies regarding the quality of their products and services may be worthy of further investigation by agencies. For instance, why is there such a range of confidence in agency outcomes? What is driving participants’ beliefs about their agencies? How do participants think their agency’s products and services can be improved? The time and effort agencies expend in answering these questions could be a wise investment and point the way to significant performance improvement in Federal agencies.

# Preparing for Success

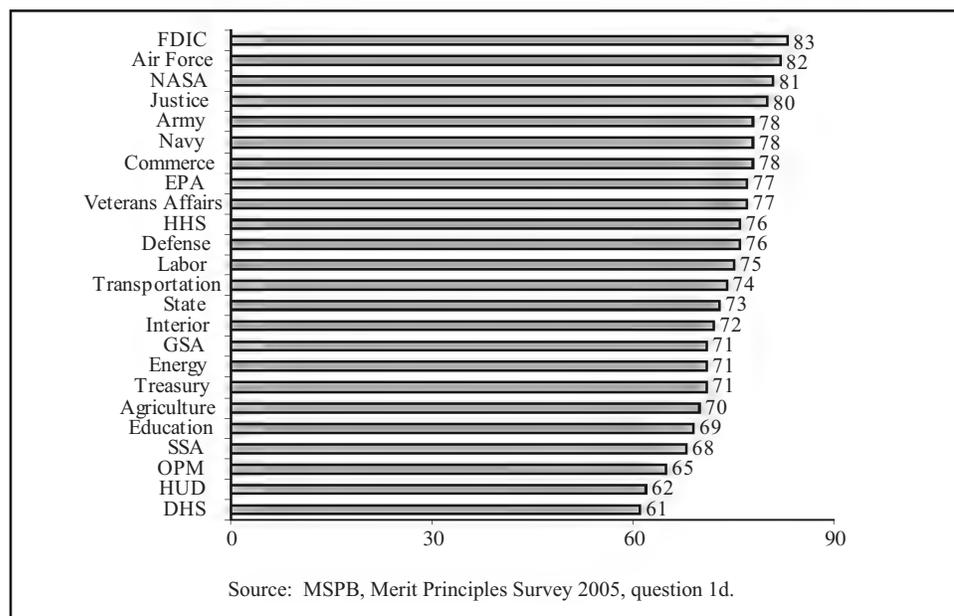
Federal employees at every level have reason to be proud of their dedication to their agency's mission and of the success they are achieving toward accomplishing this mission. This pride is appropriate because success is not accidental—it is the combination of several important factors. Hard work from Federal employees is one key factor. In this section we address several others. To sustain this success, the Federal workforce must have the skills and abilities needed to do its job. This means that agencies must attract job applicants with the abilities needed to succeed and excel at their work. Federal employees already on the job must receive sufficient training to perform effectively and make a strong contribution to the accomplishment of their agency's mission.

## Skills and Abilities of the Current Workforce

Three-quarters of the MPS 2005 survey participants (75 percent) believe that their agency's workforce has the knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish its mission. This is a high and encouraging level of endorsement, but leaves room for improvement.

**Figure 4** displays the differences among agencies' responses to this question. While the data reflect a high confidence in the skills and abilities of Federal employees across all agencies, some agencies do appear at the lower end of the rating scale. Differences in perception of workforce skill level across agencies are likely to be influenced by several factors, as discussed next.

**Figure 4. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “The workforce has job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals,” by agency**



Although agencies share many of the same types of jobs—supply specialists and administrative assistants, for example—differences in agency mission also mean that there are specialized occupations in each agency. Each occupation has its own job market and its own rate of change in the skills and abilities needed for successful performance. In agencies where one or more key occupations have rapid skill change and a competitive job market, perceptions of a higher skill gap may exist because skilled workers are difficult to recruit.

The degree to which employees have needed job skills is also partly a function of the training available, but the degree to which training is a solution is constrained by several factors. Agencies vary in the level of funding available for training. Some agencies may be able to achieve economies of scale in developing and offering training to relatively large populations of employees with the same technical specialties. Other agencies may include employees with a broader range of technical specialties, and as a result may be forced to provide a greater selection of training to meet their needs, increasing the overall cost of training. Another factor is that not all abilities can be developed equally well through training. It is reasonable for agencies to conserve resources by identifying which skills are better to train for and which are better to recruit for.

## Attracting the Right Talent

Historically, Federal turnover rates have been relatively low compared to those in other employment sectors.<sup>3</sup> Very low turnover, however, limits the “positive turnover” that can provide organizations with opportunities to hire fresh talent—with abilities that match the job as it currently needs to be done. The current human capital crisis, however, may provide the Federal Government with the challenge and opportunity to acquire a workforce with new skills and abilities during the next decade. The Office of Personnel Management recently projected that nearly 60 percent of the Federal workforce will be eligible for retirement over the next 10 years.<sup>4</sup> The opportunity to fill these positions allows agencies to use recruitment to target the skills and abilities they need most.

**Word of Mouth Recruiting.** Recognizing the importance of attracting the right talent to Federal service, MSPB has investigated the recruiting practices used by agencies to attract highly qualified individuals to job opportunities. Information provided by agencies about the relative effectiveness of different recruiting strategies highlights the importance of “word of mouth” advertising.<sup>5</sup> Potential job applicants give greater weight to the informal information about an agency that comes from friends or acquaintances who work for an agency than they do to formal job descriptions or other official communications.

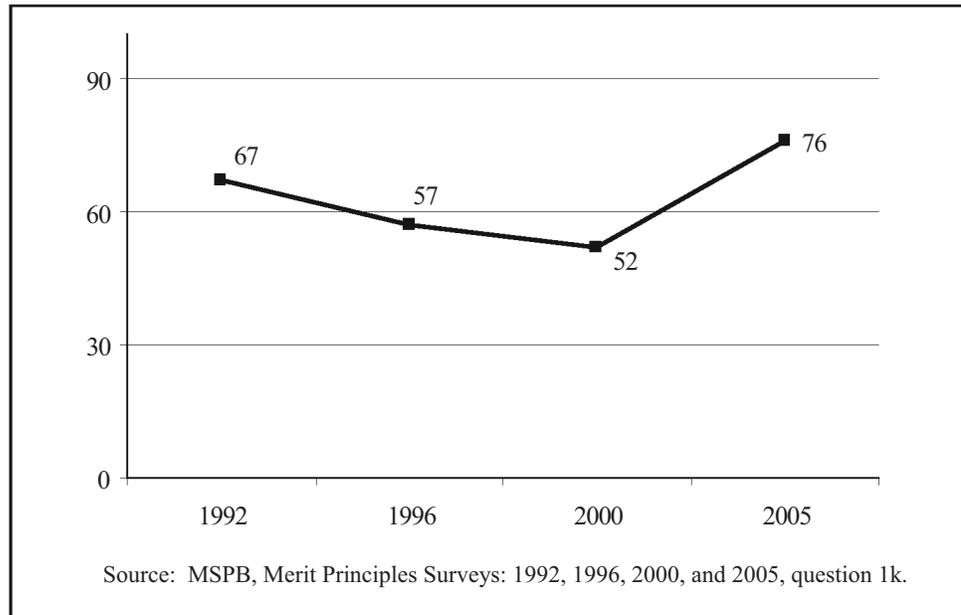
What do Federal employees say when asked if they recommend the Government or their agency as a place to work? A large percentage of survey participants (76 percent) recommend the Government as a place to work. As shown in **Figure 5**, this percentage represents a dramatic increase, not only since the 2000 administration of the Merit Principles Survey, but across the 13 years, 1992 through 2005. The decreasing trend from 1992 through 2000 of participants who would recommend the Government as an employer has reversed. Almost as many participants in 2005 (66 percent) would make a similar recommendation about employment in their current agency.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employee Tenure in 2006,” *News*, Sept. 8, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Office of Personnel Management, “OPM Director Addresses the Need for the Federal Government to Cultivate the Next Generation,” Washington, D.C., Feb. 3, 2006.

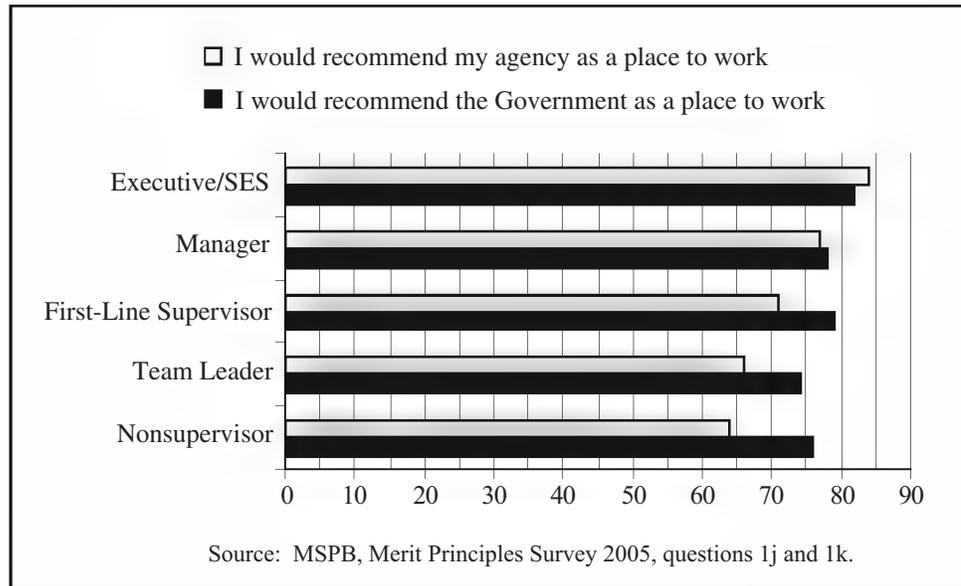
<sup>5</sup> For instance, see U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Competing for Federal Jobs: Job Experiences of New Hires*, February 2000; *Managing Federal Recruitment: Issues, Insights, and Illustrations*, Washington, D.C., September 2004.

**Figure 5. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement "I would recommend the Government as a place to work," in 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2005**



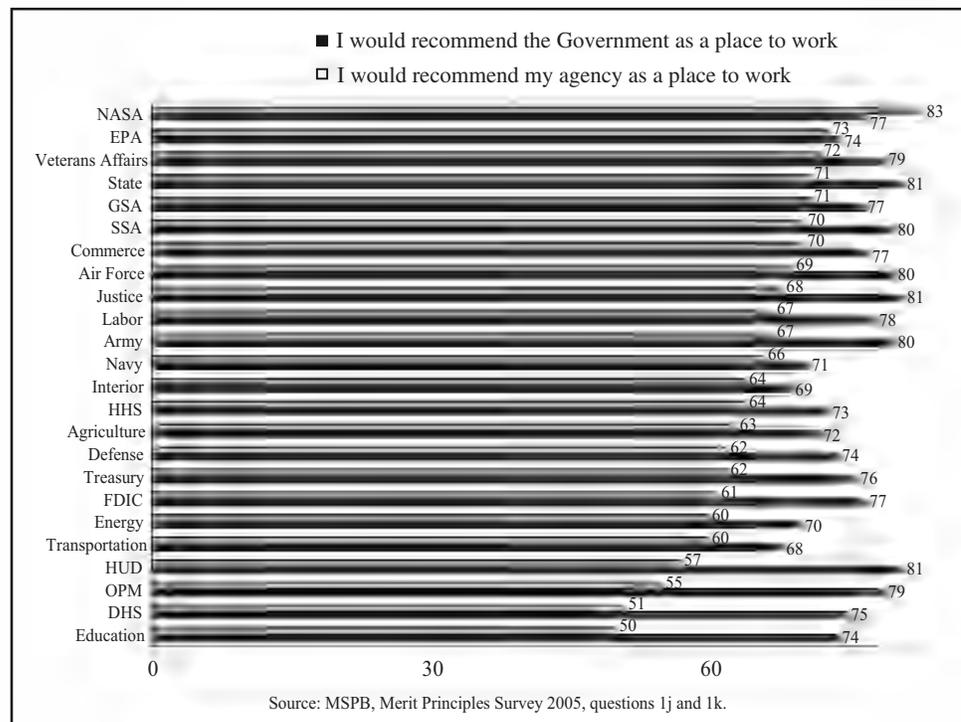
**Figure 6** shows differences in the degree to which nonsupervisors and supervisors at four levels of supervisory responsibility recommend the Government in general and their specific agency as a place to work. There is a clear trend for greater endorsement of the agency as one moves up the supervisory chain of command. At the same time, most employees below the supervisory level tend to endorse Federal employment in general more than employment with their agency. Because of the trend of higher agency endorsement by agency leaders, such employees may assume, based on their own experience, that nonsupervisory employees have perceptions of agency and Government employment that match their own. This assumption may be incorrect and may reduce the effectiveness of agency recruiting efforts as word of mouth information from some employees contradicts official agency recruitment efforts and the recommendations of agency leadership.

**Figure 6. Percent of participants agreeing with two statements about recommending Federal employment, by level of responsibility**



**Figure 7** summarizes agency differences in the degree to which all survey participants recommend their particular agency and the Federal Government as a whole as places of employment. In agencies where there is a “recommendation gap” between these two endorsements, employees who are generally enthusiastic about Federal employment have some reason to be less pleased with their current agency. This state of affairs will certainly have an effect on what these employees say to potential employees as part of recruiting efforts and should be investigated at the agency level.

**Figure 7. Percent of participants agreeing with two statements about recommending Federal employment, by agency**



**Agency Recruiting—Efforts and Obstacles.** Recruiting should be a key component of each agency’s strategy to attract the right talent. Job analysis establishes the skills and abilities needed for each position. Staffing plans determine the number of positions needed with each profile of qualifications. Effective job announcements communicate the agency’s expectations to those who may be qualified to apply for a job. These and other well-designed and effectively implemented recruitment activities should attract applicants who have the needed skills and abilities and are motivated and prepared to enter Federal service. But there are a number of obstacles to Federal recruitment and selection.

The MPS 2005 asked first-line supervisors and other managers who have been involved in making recent hires to describe the primary obstacle they face in hiring employees. These survey participants were asked to type a brief narrative response to this question rather than to select from a list of potential obstacles. This allowed us to learn what obstacles look like from the perspective of, and in the language of, those who experience them. We sorted the responses to this question into the categories in **Table 1.**<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1. Primary Obstacle in Hiring Employees**

Shortage of Qualified Applicants	38%
No Approval for Position	13%
Lack of Funding	13%
Process is Slow and Bureaucratic	11%
Constraints of Federal Hiring Regulations	6%
Not Enough Manager Involvement	6%
Low Salaries Offered to New Hires	4%
Inadequate Selection Tools	2%
Problems with Specific People and Offices	1%
Other	2%
No Significant Barriers to Hiring	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

The greatest perceived obstacle, reported by well over a third (38 percent) of those responding to this question, was a shortage of qualified applicants. When these hiring officials consider the applicants available to them to choose from, many are dissatisfied with their qualifications. The second two most frequent categories reflect the frustration experienced by first-line supervisors and other managers with processes internal to their agencies. Thirteen percent see agency-imposed hiring freezes and limits on the number of full-time employees as a hiring obstacle—one which stops the hiring process before it begins. A nearly equal number (13 percent) cite the limits of agency budgets, both to pay for additional positions and to allow employees to devote time to hiring processes.

<sup>6</sup> The results in Table 1 are based on the responses of 7,898 MPS 2005 participants who answered this question. Responses in smaller categories that account for fewer than 1 percent of the total number of responses are grouped together in the “Other” category.

Just over 1 in 10 (11 percent) of hiring managers give voice to a common frustration with Federal hiring—that it is a slow process that includes a great deal of unnecessary process and red tape. This frustration is similar in nature to that expressed by 6 percent of hiring managers who feel blocked by specific hiring regulations and requirements. A nearly equal share (6 percent) would like to have a more direct and greater role in hiring, taking over some responsibilities currently held by their human resources offices or by their headquarters staff. These findings are consistent with findings from other MSPB research.

These perceptions of MPS 2005 survey participants involved in hiring are similar to the symptoms reported to a medical practitioner. They are accurate descriptions of the “pain” being experienced, but may not be directly related to the underlying cause of the problem. As with physical illness, solutions that address only the symptoms of the hiring problem may seem satisfactory in the short term, but are not a substitute for a deeper cure of Federal hiring ailments.

Continuing with this analogy, let’s look at what is causing hiring officials’ major complaint—dissatisfaction with the pool of qualified applicants. For some occupations there may be a shortage of applicants in general—as is currently the case for the nursing occupation. Another possible explanation is that qualified applicants are finding employment elsewhere—possibly with faster responding employers—while the Federal hiring process drags on. In addition, job seekers may find it easier to apply for jobs with other employers because they do not require long narrative statements or skill assessment questionnaires. Agency managers and human resources personnel can investigate this last possibility by examining the qualifications of applicants who request removal from consideration before a hiring decision is made.

One additional possibility deserves consideration. A relatively small number (2 percent) of hiring officials indicate that the selection tools used were an obstacle to hiring. This could be a wider problem, though. Because first-line supervisors and hiring managers may not know how to evaluate whether appropriate assessment tools are being used for their hiring processes, they may not be aware of a problem. Most employees who make hiring decisions have some familiarity with interviews, reference checks, and other typical selection tools. They may be less familiar with best practices—as opposed to *common* practices—in the use of these tools and would not be able to detect the presence of poor selection tools. The primary effect of poor selection tools is a resulting pool of highly scored but poorly qualified applicants.

MSPB advises agencies to examine the quality of the selection tools used in their hiring processes. As they work to reduce the time it takes to hire—a reasonable goal—it is important that agencies do not avoid tools or remove other elements of the process that can enhance the quality of the resulting candidate pool. Speed is important, but quality needs to be maintained and increased if hiring officials are to be given more qualified applicants to choose from.

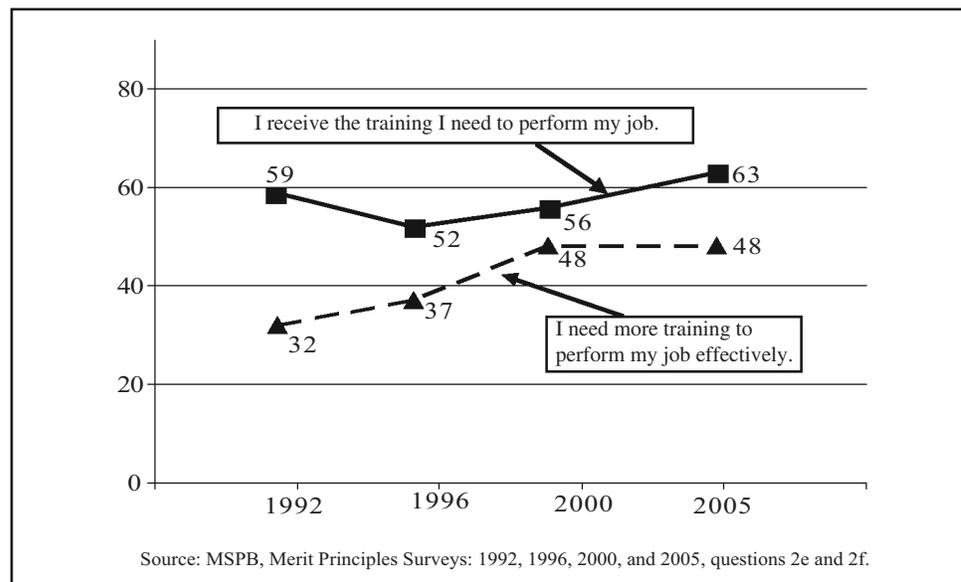
Workforce data indicate that applicants hired into Federal jobs are likely to remain in Federal service for a long time. It is worth additional attention to selection processes to ensure that the most qualified individuals join the workforce and contribute to the long-term success of Federal agencies. When staffing ceilings, talent shortages, or other factors reduce the feasibility of selection as a strategy to add needed skills to the workforce, agencies will need to acquire these skills through contracting or by developing them in their current employees.

## Getting Enough Training

Training is a familiar and often-used strategy for developing skills in existing employees. The rate of change in workplace procedures means that employees must expect to learn continuously throughout their employment. The MPS 2005 asked participants several questions about training to gauge their perceptions and expectations about training opportunities. Sixty percent of our survey participants believe that their organization gives them a significant opportunity to improve their skills. Although this section focuses on training as a key strategy in skill development, also key are developmental assignments, access to fellow employees with expertise, and time away from work duties for skill development.

**Figure 8** summarizes responses to two training questions that have appeared on the last four administrations of our Merit Principles Survey. Historical trends show an overall increase in the percentage of participants who believe they receive the basic training needed to perform their jobs (“I receive the training I need to perform my job.”). The number of participants who believe they need additional training (“I need more training to perform my job effectively.”) increased during the 1990s and then leveled off across the last two survey administrations.

**Figure 8. Percent of participants agreeing with two statements about their training needs in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2005**



As we discovered in our previous MPS research using these two training questions,<sup>7</sup> the first question addresses the training employees need to perform the basic functions of their jobs. This is the training equivalent of “minimum qualifications” that assure that the employee knows enough to do basic, acceptable work on the job. The second question addresses the training employees believe they need to tune their performance to a higher level.

These explanations allow us to interpret the historical trends in Figure 8. These data show the Federal Government improving at the task of training for basic job skills, ensuring that all employees have the minimum qualifications to do their jobs. When it comes to tuning the skills of the workforce to higher levels beyond the minimum, agencies remain at the same point as in 2000. Nearly half of the workforce (48 percent) believes they need more training to perform their job effectively.

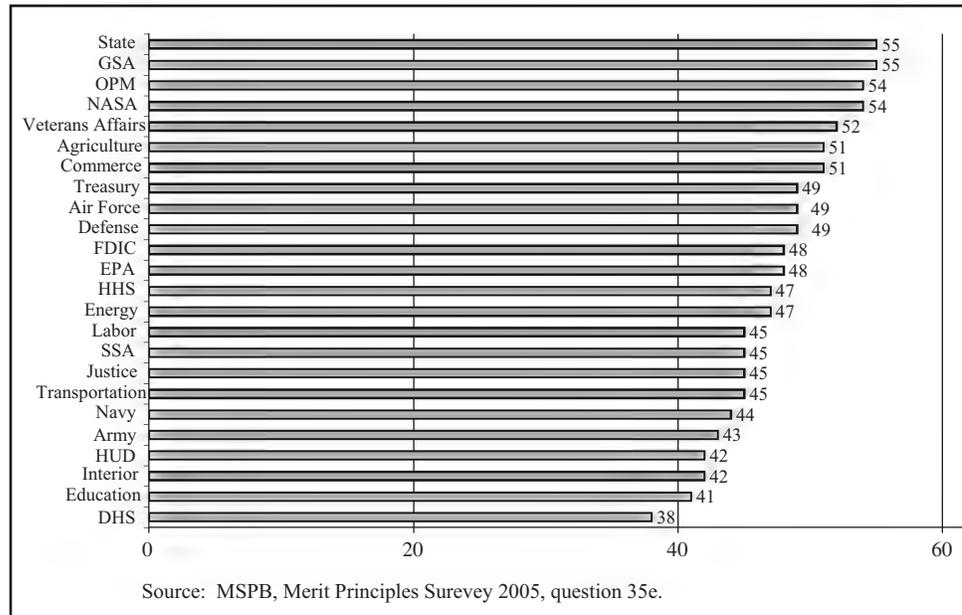
Employees who believe they need more training will have to consider their assessments in the context of organizational realities. First, even for the most accurately perceived training need, the training may not be available. In a climate of decreasing agency budgets training dollars are vulnerable and may be less available than other pieces of the agency’s budget, no matter how legitimate the training need. Second, the supervisor may determine that the performance or skill gap perceived by the employee has an organizational solution, such as hiring another employee to fill in where the first employee lacks the required skill or ability or reorganizing how work is performed in the work unit. Either approach may solve the organization’s need for an additional skill set without training. Nevertheless, organizations may need to do a better job of understanding what training employees may need to perform their jobs better.

It is noteworthy that only half (47 percent) of MPS 2005 participants see their supervisors as a source of opportunities to improve their skills and performance, which would include training opportunities. **Figure 9** compares agencies on the degree to which employees view their supervisors as resources to help them obtain training or other means to improve their performance. While there appears to be a large gap in the extent to which employees believe that their supervisors provide the training and developmental opportunities they think are needed, there may be legitimate reasons why supervisors are not meeting these perceived needs. On the one hand, as discussed earlier, funds for training are often limited and supervisors may be forced to prioritize what training is to be funded. In many instances supervisors may be making carefully calculated decisions about which employees to invest resources in to better achieve the agency’s mission under resource constraints. In other cases, supervisors may disagree with employee assessments of the need for or the value of the training that employees think they could use. In either case, supervisors and their employees both have the responsibility to communicate with each other about their expectations and how best to make the most productive training decisions.

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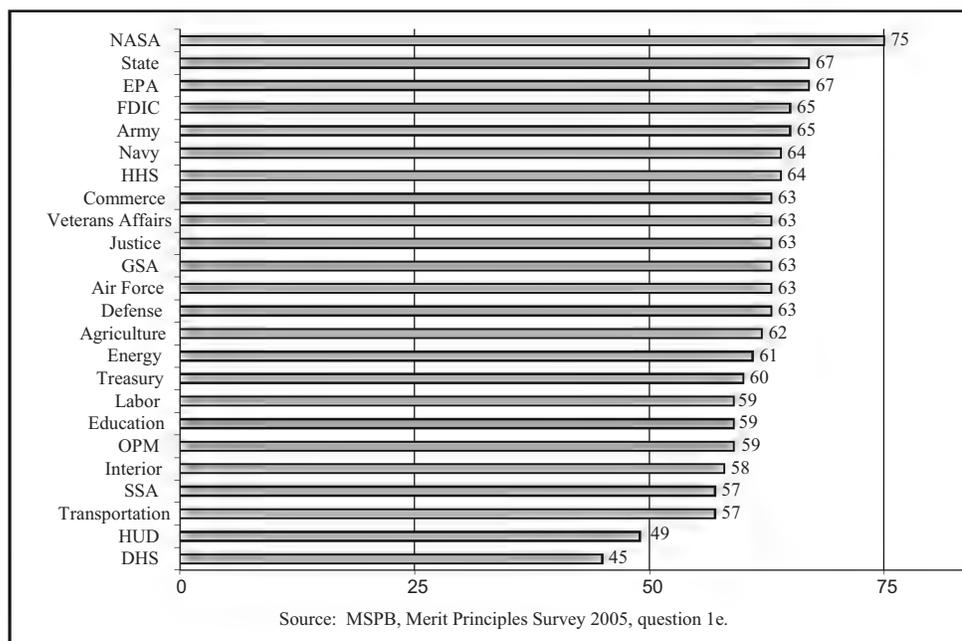
<sup>7</sup> U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *The Federal Workforce for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Results of the Merit Principles Survey 2000*, Washington, D.C., September, 2003.

**Figure 9. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “My supervisor provides coaching, training opportunities, or other assistance to help me improve my skills and performance,” by agency**



**Figure 10** compares the responses of participants in different agencies in terms of the opportunity they believe their agency gives them to improve their skills. This question addresses the general climate within an agency to support employee development, whether that development comes through formal training, less formal rotational assignments, or other agency-funded, but self-directed learning through reading or e-learning.

**Figure 10. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization,” by agency**



While Figure 10's data are positive overall, there is room for improvement for all agencies, even those that are apparently meeting employee expectations better than others. MSPB encourages agencies to examine the processes employees use to request training and the criteria used to approve such requests. In addition, agencies should identify barriers to training. In some cases, funding may constrain access to needed training. In some cases, employees may not have time to attend training because of a fast-paced work environment. In still other cases, lack of communication between supervisors and their employees about what type of training is needed and how it can be obtained may constitute a barrier. Once the barriers have been identified, agencies should facilitate employees and their supervisors working together to identify how to meet training needs within the constraints of the organization.

## Getting the Right Training

It is not sufficient just to have “more training” available. It needs to be the appropriate training offered to an employee with the right preparation in terms of pre-training planning with the supervisor to ensure the training's likelihood of contributing to agency mission achievement. Then the training must be offered at the right time and be conducted in an effective manner. The responsibility for this alignment lies with the employees who need training, the supervisors who approve the training, and the training specialists who provide access to training opportunities.

**Linking Training to Agency Mission.** It is easy to assume that all training and development opportunities are beneficial and result in increased employee skill levels—and that this increased skill set will help improve an agency's ability to accomplish its mission. Unfortunately, some of the time, employee development has no such impact. As MSPB found in previous research, many employees seek—and are given—training opportunities as a reward or as an excuse for travel to be trained in an interesting location.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes employees seek training that may be an enhancement to their post-Government career, an addition to their personal skill set, or just an opportunity to accompany friends who are attending a training event. When funds for training are limited, these off-target training occurrences should be minimized.

Supervisors need to work with their employees so that expectations for training are set accurately for both supervisors and those they supervise. Employees have a responsibility to communicate their learning needs to their supervisors and explain how these needs are related to their job and the agency's mission.

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<sup>8</sup>U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Leadership for Change: Human Resources Development in the Federal Government*, Washington, D.C., July 1995.

Supervisors have a responsibility to ensure that their employees understand several important things. First, training requested is not training guaranteed. Training requested from a supervisor must pass several additional hurdles. The training must make the employee more effective in his or her current job to improve the employee's contribution to agency mission achievement. If it contributes to the employee's future career development, this is a benefit for the employee, but its primary purpose is to contribute to performance on the current job if the organization is to pay for it. The second issue is that funds must be available to pay for the training. Training funds—even for well-justified, job-related training—are often simply not available. Finally, supervisors need to be sure that their employees understand that supervisors often cannot send all of their employees to training for the same skill. They may send only one or a few employees so that the trained skill will be present in their work unit so the work will be done more effectively. They need to decide, using a number of factors, which employee(s) it makes the most sense to send.

Supervisors also need information that must come directly from those whom they supervise or that they must obtain by working with each of their employees. Employees need to inform supervisors of any difficulties they are having doing their work that might be eased by additional training. Because supervisors monitor the quality of their employees' contributions, they can often gain perspective on this from their monitoring activities. However, employees should not be trapped in a "gap analysis" view of training—that it is only useful to remediate weaknesses. Supervisors should also encourage their employees to inform them about strengths they would like to develop that might move their acceptable performance to higher levels. As a practical matter, employees may also need to be proactive about informing their supervisors about specific training events or opportunities that are a match for the skills they want to develop.

Discussions between supervisors and employees about training should often be documented and available for review by management as well as by employees and supervisors. One way of documenting these discussions with proper attention to agency mission achievement is with a formal career development plan.<sup>9</sup> The MPS 2005 found that one-third (33 percent) of survey participants had specified the skill they most need to perform well in their current job in a career development plan. It is hoped that the remaining two-thirds are thoroughly discussing training and development needs with their supervisors as well. For some employees it is possible that the linkage of training to the agency's mission has already been achieved by being listed in an occupation development plan that applies to many employees in an agency who have the same training needs. Other employees in jobs with more unique or rapidly changing requirements, such as scientists or technical specialists, may need to have more frequent discussions with their supervisors to update their

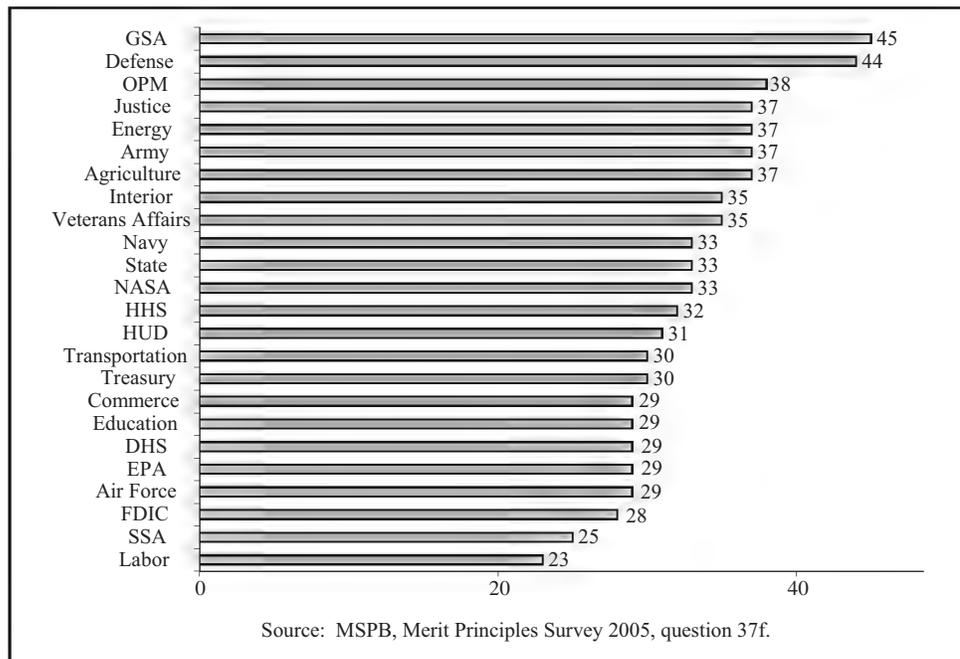
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<sup>9</sup>Career development plans, sometimes known as Individual Development Plans (IDP's), are formal documents which describe the training and development experiences—including rotational assignments and other special duties—that an employee will undertake to develop job-related skills. Such documents clarify training plans for the employee, supervisor, and others in the agency such as upper management and training and development specialists who may be called on to assist in obtaining training opportunities.

common understanding of the training and development opportunities they need. When these and the other steps called for in this section are followed, training can become a strong factor contributing to agency mission accomplishment, not just another expense.

In concluding this section on linking training and agency mission, we note that some agencies do not stress the importance of career development plans—and their choice may be correct for the mix of occupations they contain. **Figure 11** compares participant responses in different agencies in terms of whether they specified their most important learning need in such a plan. Agencies in which this form of specification is not used should take steps to ensure that other channels—such as employee-supervisor discussions—are available to address development needs and set appropriate expectations for both employees and their supervisors.

**Figure 11. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “This skill or ability is described on my formal career development plan,” by agency**

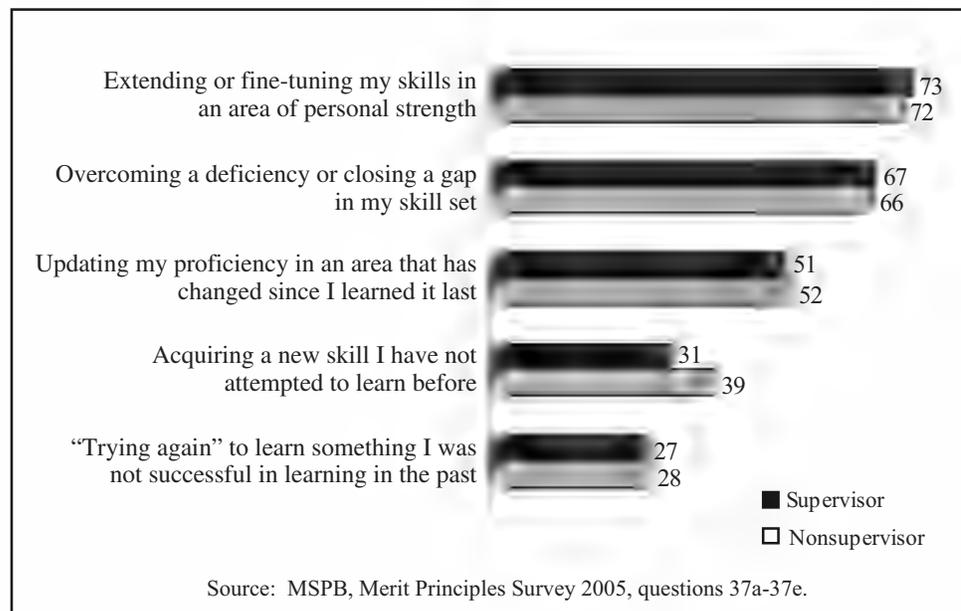


**Type of Training.** The MPS 2005 asked all participants to describe the skill for which they most crucially needed to obtain training in order to take the next step in their career path. After survey participants identified their most important training need, they responded to a series of additional questions about the form this training should take and how it should be funded. This provides us a view not just of employees’ thoughts about training in general, but also of their thoughts about the training they believe they need most.

We first asked participants to indicate how training for their most needed skill fit into their personal learning histories. The results are displayed in **Figure 12**, which contrasts supervisors and nonsupervisory employees. Most survey participants

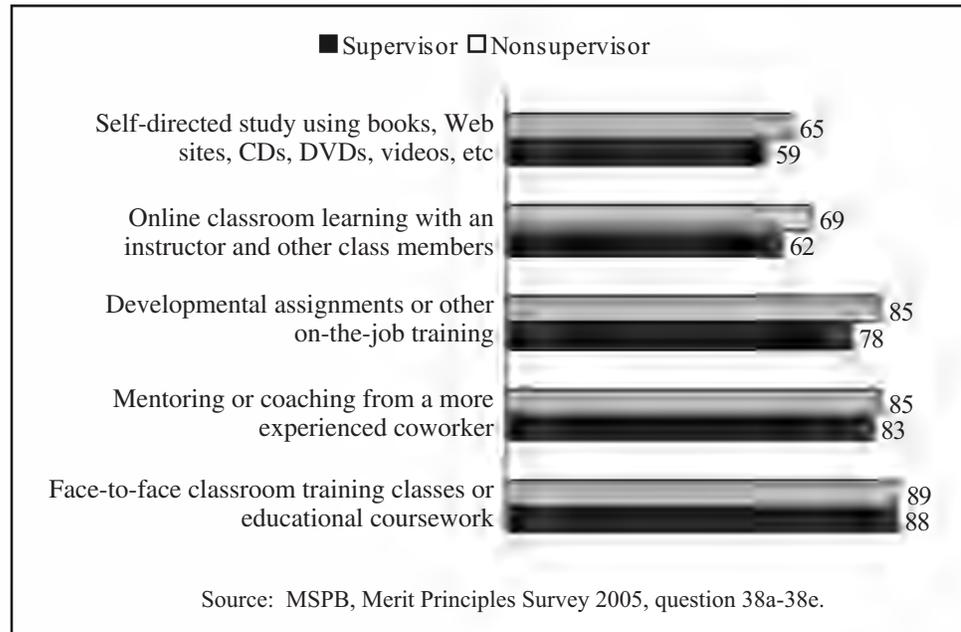
would be fine-tuning a skill in an area of personal strength (73 percent of supervisors and 72 percent of nonsupervisors), indicating that most employees want to use training to extend and improve their existing skills to achieve high performance. Only just over one-fourth of survey participants (27 percent of supervisors and 28 percent of nonsupervisors) would be attempting to learn something that they have been unsuccessful at learning in the past. These results indicate that, for the most part, Federal employees are trying to use training to improve themselves by building on their strengths rather than struggling with weaknesses or past failures. This is consistent with our earlier picture of a generally well-prepared workforce whose members have largely mastered the basic skills needed to do their jobs and want to extend them.

**Figure 12. Percent of participants agreeing with the listed statements about developing targeted skills or ability, by supervisory status**



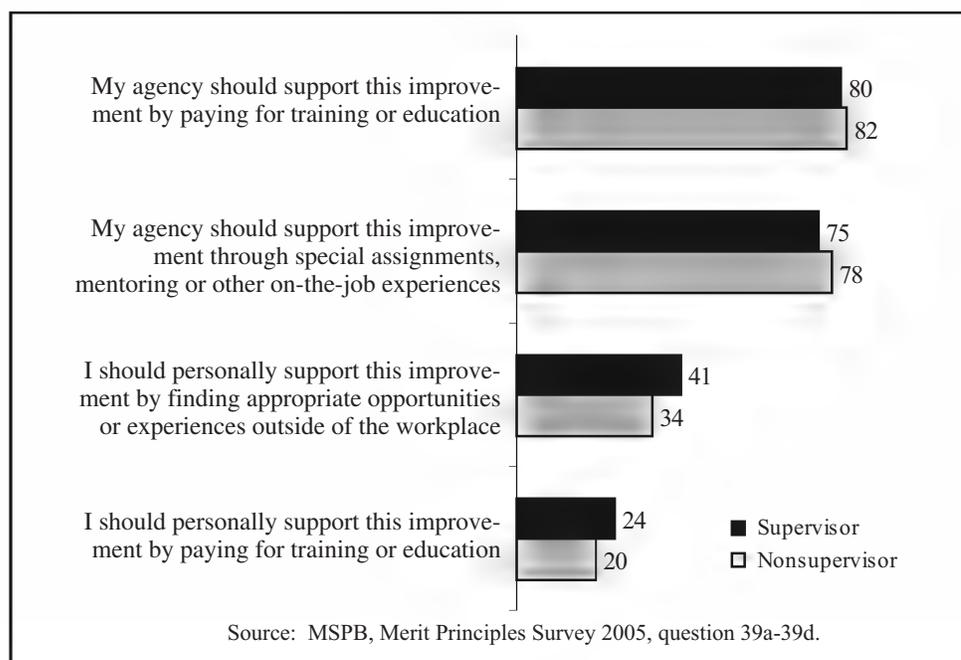
Our second training follow-up question asked participants to indicate the relative effectiveness of five different modes of training to help them learn their most needed skill. As shown in **Figure 13**, nonsupervisory employees and their supervisors prefer traditional modes of employee development such as classroom training, mentoring, and developmental assignments. Many are less convinced that online learning or e-learning is an effective solution for their most critical training needs.

**Figure 13. Percent of participants indicating effectiveness of the listed strategies for developing targeted skills or ability, by supervisory status**



Finally, we were interested in where participants place the responsibility to provide resources and support for training. The patterns in **Figure 14** are clear. Most participants believe that development of their skills should be funded by agencies through formal training (81 percent) and on-the-job developmental experiences (78 percent).

**Figure 14. Percent of participants agreeing with the listed statements about how to support improving targeted skills or ability, by supervisory status**



Responses to a related question about training reveal that neither supervisors nor nonsupervisors expect automation or ready-to-hand reference manuals to excuse them from learning their new skill—only 16 percent believe that some form of work redesign would make their new learning unnecessary. Automation of some job tasks and the availability of good reference materials will make some jobs easier, but will not be a cure-all that replaces the need for new skill development. Nor do most survey participants expect them to be.

**Training in Perspective.** While training is not the answer for every need to build skill sets in the workplace, it is often the answer. Training is either the first choice for easily trainable job skills or the choice of last recourse when current employees must be trained because hiring new ones is not an option.

When training is the answer, it should of course be done efficiently as well as effectively. As the Board's recent study of best practices in recruiting found, it can be very useful for agencies to share best practices in areas of common interest, such as training. This sharing allows agencies that have discovered or developed effective processes to offer their insights to colleagues in agencies looking for better solutions. All of this can occur through informal exchanges between training specialists, common in informal working groups, and discussions in the relevant professional associations.<sup>10</sup> Such efforts may also provide the opportunity for agencies to pool resources to train employees in similar occupations, with similar needs. Such pooling has the potential to reduce the cost of training for employees in smaller occupations and for smaller agencies.

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<sup>10</sup> The Training Manager's Network initiated this year by training specialists who belong to the International Personnel Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) is one example of an effective communication channel that exists outside the organizational structure of Federal agencies. A great deal of information about training best practices—and practices to avoid—is shared through this group's email list ([trainingmgr@ipma-hr.org](mailto:trainingmgr@ipma-hr.org)).

The National Association for Government Training and Development (NAGTAD, [www.nagtad.org](http://www.nagtad.org)) organizes an annual conference for Federal, state, and local training professionals and is a source of information about training in the public sector.

Although its membership includes private sector training specialists as well as Federal and other public sector trainers, the Web site of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD, [www.astd.org](http://www.astd.org)) is another source of best practices information about employee development.

# Overcoming Barriers to Success

A Federal workforce that is well prepared to succeed can still fall short of success. Unresolved problems in the workplace create barriers to success that divert energy from working on the agency's mission and, over time, discourage even the best employees from trying their hardest. When Federal employees do not feel well informed, when they believe they are not treated fairly, when the workplace is disrupted by a major conflict between employees or between an employee and a supervisor, working becomes more difficult. When trust is not present between employees and their supervisors, efforts to overcome these barriers may be marked for failure before they begin. In this section we review responses to questions we asked participants about whether these are problems they encounter while working as Federal employees.

## An Information Gap Between Employees and Supervisors

According to the MPS 2005 results, fewer nonsupervisory employees than supervisors believe they are well-informed in the Federal workplace. For example, more supervisors (78 percent versus 57 percent for nonsupervisors) believe information is shared freely in their work units. Fewer nonsupervisors (63 percent versus 80 percent of supervisors) report that a spirit of cooperation and teamwork conducive to information sharing exists in their work units. Supervisors have a moderate level of trust in their own supervisors (69 percent) and in upper management (60 percent) to keep them informed. Nonsupervisors have less trust that they will be given important information by their supervisors (59 percent) and upper management (49 percent). It is not possible to determine from our survey data whether these perceptions reflect reality, but it is clear that the level of belief that they are well informed is lower for nonsupervisors than for supervisors.

The information gap is also evident in responses to a set of questions about employee performance and performance ratings. Supervisors and nonsupervisors alike overwhelmingly agree (99 percent) that pay should be based on job performance. Nonsupervisory employees may be at a relative disadvantage in their grasp of how the performance rating system works to achieve this, however.

Employees specifically report that they are not as well-informed as many would like about issues surrounding evaluation of their performance. While most employees know what is expected of them on the job (85 percent) and understand the basis for their most recent performance rating (81 percent), fewer understand what they must

do to receive a higher performance rating in the next appraisal cycle (69 percent). As we might expect, fewer nonsupervisory employees (68 percent) than supervisory employees (75 percent) understand how their performance rating is determined. Only half (49 percent) of nonsupervisory employees participate in setting the goals and standards on which they will be evaluated. One fifth of nonsupervisory employees (22 percent) are even unsure about the number of rating levels in their performance appraisal system. Although the rationale for their performance ratings may be made clear when, or shortly after, they receive their ratings, too many nonsupervisory employees do not understand how their performance appraisal system is structured and how it will be used to evaluate them.

As indicated above, supervisors are better informed about these matters. Only 5 percent of supervisors report that they are unaware of the structure of their performance appraisal system. Also, a higher percentage of supervisors (60 percent versus 49 percent) participate in setting the standards and goals that will be used to evaluate their performance.

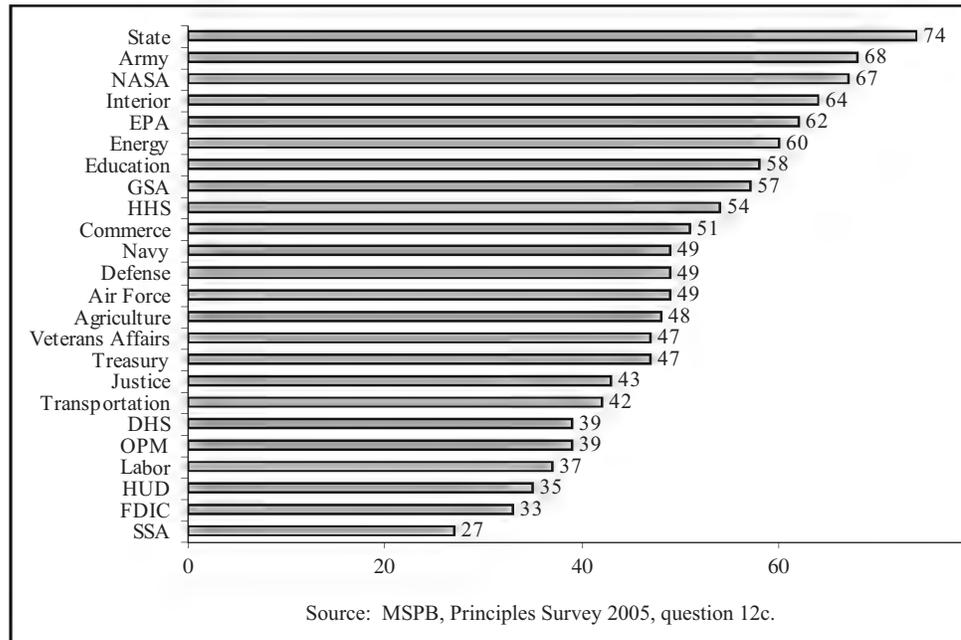
Why do nonsupervisory employees believe that they are less informed than they would like? One explanation is that supervisors are not sharing information as effectively as they could, or in as timely a manner. For example, only 61 percent of nonsupervisory employees believe that discussions with their supervisors about performance are worthwhile, that their supervisors provide constructive feedback about their job performance (57 percent), or that their supervisors keep them informed about how well they are doing (57 percent). While these numbers represent a majority, clearly many nonsupervisory employees believe that their supervisors could be communicating more effectively.

**Figure 15** shows a cross-agency comparison of the degree to which survey respondents participate in setting the standards and goals that will be used to evaluate their performance. This participation allows for a specific type of communication between employees and their supervisors that should be occurring if employees at all levels are to make the contribution to their agency's mission that their supervisors expect. This communication must occur if all employees are to be evaluated according to their expected contribution to this mission.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In fact communication of goals and performance standards is more than good management practice, it is a legal requirement. See 5 U.S.C. § 4302.

**Figure 15. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “I participate in setting standards and goals used to evaluate my job performance,” by agency**



It is important for agency leaders, from political appointees to first-level supervisors, to realize that many of their front-line employees believe they need to be better informed—and most likely can be. In a Federal workforce where fewer nonsupervisory employees than supervisors believe they can openly express concerns (66 percent versus 76 percent), or that their opinions count at work (52 percent versus 70 percent), many nonsupervisory employees themselves may not express this need directly.

Leaders from first-line supervisors to senior executives should take the initiative to close any information gaps in their own agencies, organizations, and work units. Nonsupervisory employees also have a responsibility to facilitate information sharing by reducing barriers to communication and having realistic expectations in case the information they want is not available. Cooperation on both sides of the supervisory “fence” will open the gate and allow information to pass freely in both directions. Agency leaders are gatekeepers for information about the agency’s mission and how those they supervise are expected to contribute to it. As a practical matter it is they, rather than the employees they supervise, who must take the first steps toward bridging the information gap.

## Employee Perceptions of Unfair Treatment

Fair and equitable treatment has been a recurring topic of MSPB interest.

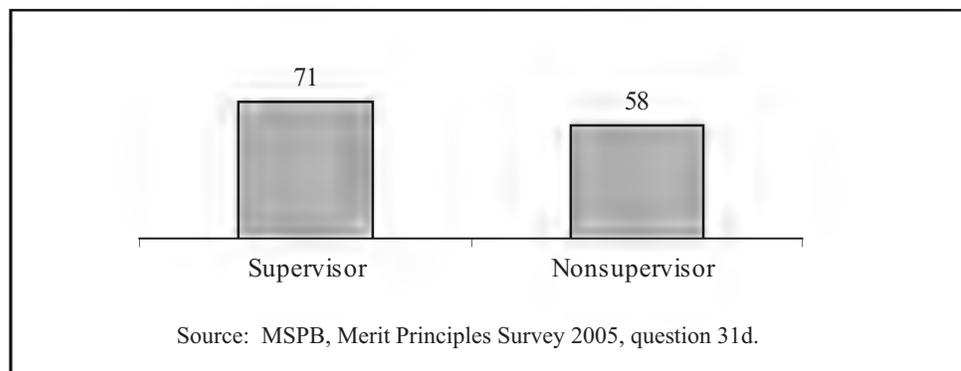
Employees who do not believe they are treated fairly will not be able to make their strongest contribution to their agencies’ missions. They will be less comfortable working with—and communicating with—those they believe treat them unfairly,

and they will generally be more uncomfortable in their work environment. This topic is of such importance that the Board studies it in depth on a recurring basis.<sup>12</sup> The Board is currently conducting a study of fair treatment that will address the topic in greater depth than we do here. In this section, we review some of the general findings about perceptions of unfair treatment from the MPS 2005 and consider how such perceptions may create barriers to agency mission accomplishment.

**Agency and Supervisor Fairness.** We asked our sample of Federal employees several direct questions about how they are treated in the workplace. Some of these questions have also been asked in previous administrations of the MPS, allowing us to examine trends in fair treatment over time.

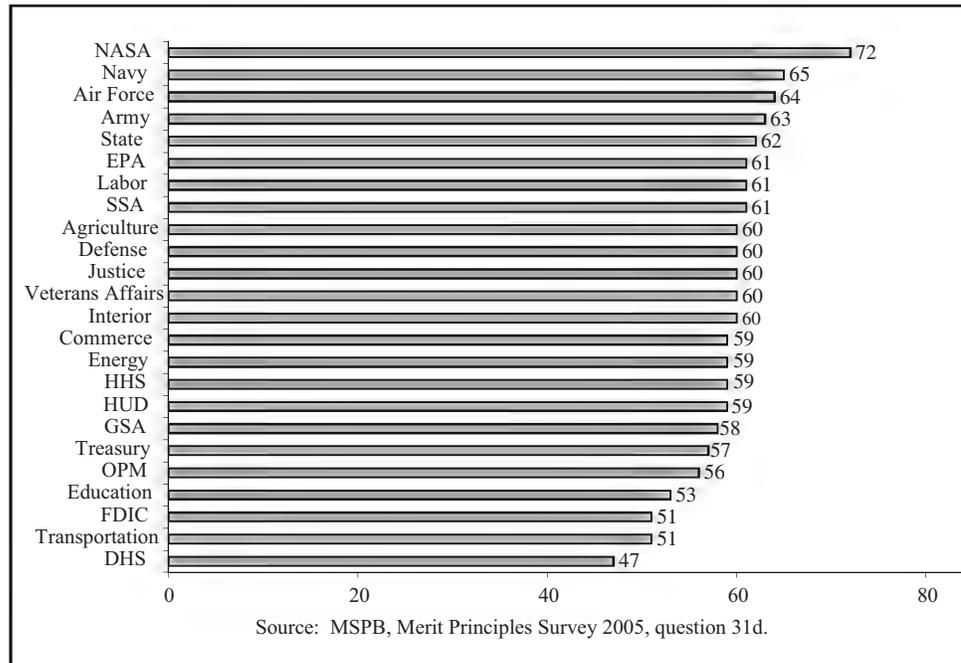
Most of our survey participants (60 percent) believe that their agency treats them fairly in matters related to employment, but there is room for improvement. **Figure 16** shows that a greater number of supervisory employees (71 percent) than nonsupervisory employees (58 percent) believe their agency treats them fairly. **Figure 17** compares agencies on the perception of general fair treatment by their employees.

**Figure 16. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “I believe my agency treats me fairly in matters related to my employment,” by supervisory status**



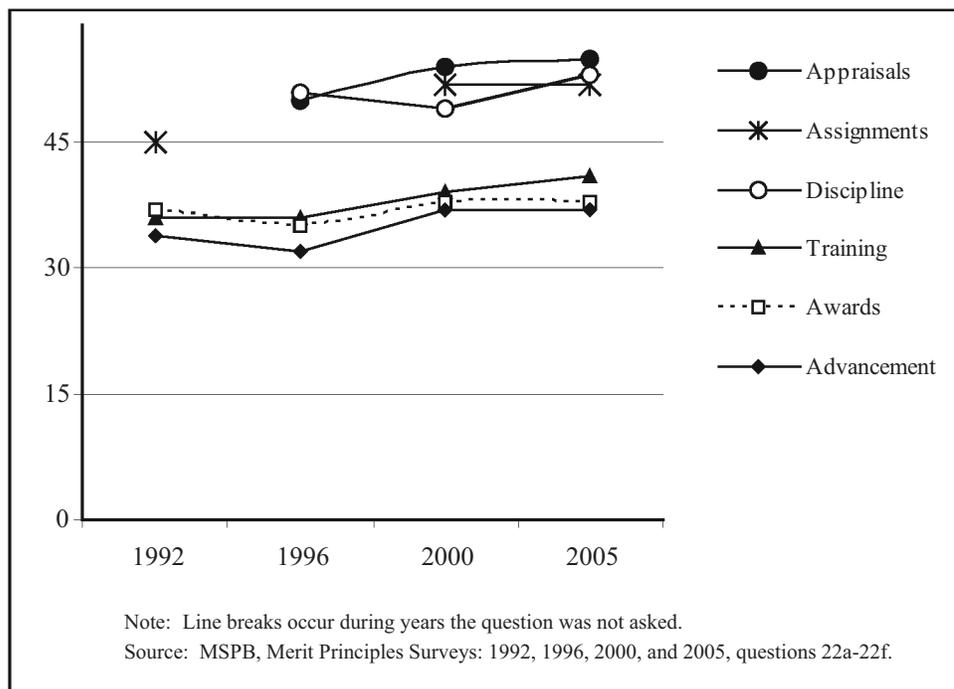
<sup>12</sup> For instance, see U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *A Question of Equity: Women and the Glass Ceiling in the Federal Government*, October 1992; *Fair and Equitable Treatment: A Progress Report on Minority Employment in the Federal Government*, August 1996; *Achieving a Representative Federal Workforce: Addressing the Barriers to Hispanic Participation*, September 1997.

**Figure 17. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “I believe my agency treats me fairly in matters related to my employment,” by agency**



**Figure 18** presents the results of MPS 2005 questions about fair treatment in six specific areas of employee and agency concern. Using data from previous administrations of the Merit Principles Survey, we compared 2005 responses with responses in previous years. For all six categories the MPS 2005 survey found that the same or a slightly greater percentage of employees believed their agency treated them fairly. Perceptions of fair treatment divide into two sets of issues. Just over half of MPS 2005 participants believe they are treated fairly with respect to performance appraisals (55 percent), job assignments (52 percent), and discipline for employee misconduct (53 percent). Over a third of our participants believe they are treated fairly with respect to training (41 percent), awards (38 percent), and promotion opportunities (37 percent). Although agencies are not losing ground with respect to their employees' perceptions of fair treatment by their agency, there is room for improvement according to employees.

**Figure 18. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “In the past 2 years, to what extent do you believe you have been treated fairly regarding various aspects of your job,” in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2005**



When survey participants are asked about the fairness of their supervisors, an interesting pattern emerges—supervisors are consistently regarded as treating their employees with a relatively high degree of fairness. Large majorities of supervisory and nonsupervisory employees agree that their supervisors fairly assess their performance and contributions (71 percent), listen fairly to their concerns (71 percent), apply discipline fairly (64 percent), and fairly and accurately rate their performance (62 percent). Although responses to the specific questions about agency and supervisor fairness differ, there is a pattern of greater perceived supervisor fairness than overall agency fairness. In this sense, supervisors are well regarded by their employees.

The key to reducing perceived unfairness may rest with the relationship between employees and their supervisors. When employees trust their supervisors to treat them fairly, this greatly improves the working relationship and enables work units to accomplish much more than when an environment of distrust exists. For example, trust facilitates communication, which enables supervisors and their employees to work together more effectively, with the ultimate result of greater opportunities for accomplishing the agency’s mission.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ronald W. Perry, “The Relationship of Affective Organizational Commitment with Supervisory Trust,” *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, vol. 24, No. 2, 133-149 (2004).

**Prohibited Personnel Practices.** One specific reason that the Merit Systems Protection Board conducts our recurring survey is to track the prevalence of specific personnel practices that agencies must avoid.<sup>14</sup> These “prohibited personnel practices” (PPP’s) include specific forms of discrimination, nepotism, retaliation for employee whistleblowing, and interference with merit-based hiring and efficient management of the workforce.

**Table 2. Percent of participants reporting the occurrence of select prohibited personnel practices**

In the past 2 years, do you feel you have been...	1986	1989	1992	1996	2000	2005
Denied a job or promotion because one of the selecting or recommending officials gave an unfair advantage to another applicant?	—	—	19	25	22	17
Deliberately misled by an agency official about your right to compete for a job or promotion	—	—	16	18	14	12
Influenced by an agency official to withdraw from competition for a Federal job or promotion in order to help another person’s chances of getting that job or promotion?	4	5	5	5	4	3
Denied a job or promotion which went instead to the relative of one of the selecting or recommending officials?	6	6	4	5	4	3

From Merit Principles Surveys conducted in 1986, 1989, 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2005.

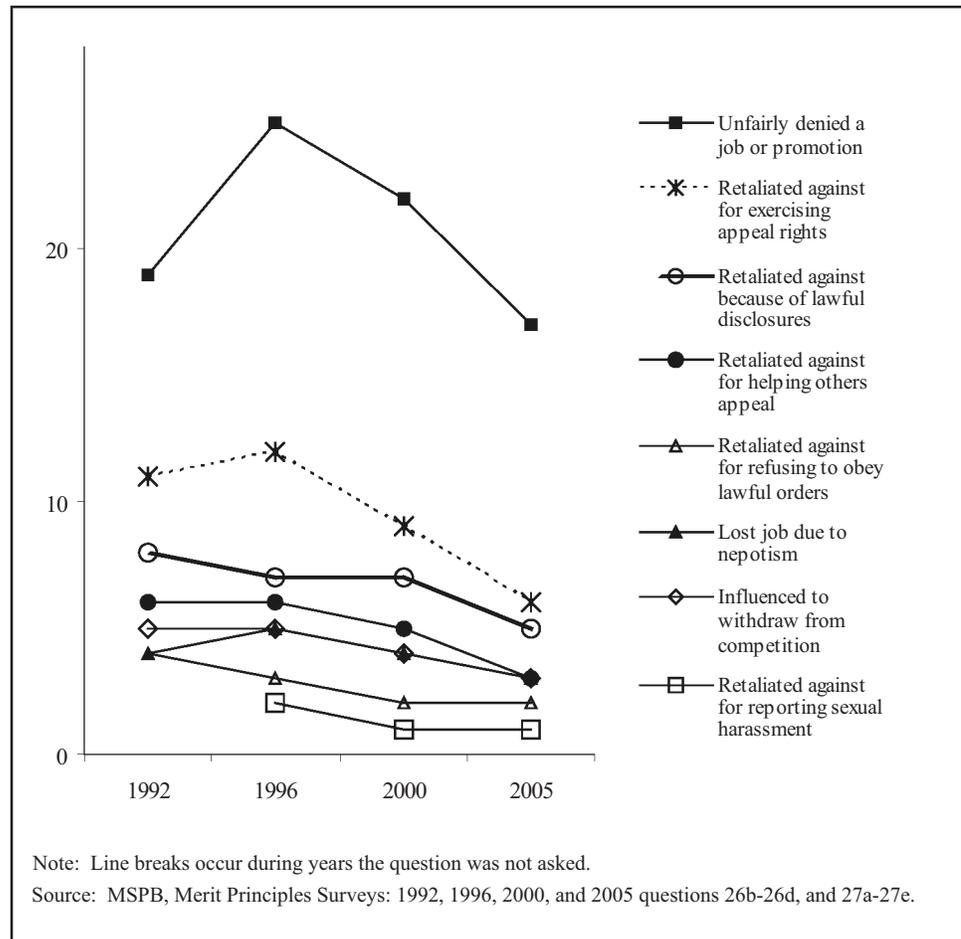
**Table 2** contains data from Merit Principles Surveys conducted across the 19-year period 1986-2005. In responses to questions about PPP’s, employees reported fewer of these practices during the 2 years prior to the MPS 2005 survey administration than at any other time in the two decades under review. There could be several explanations for this apparent improvement. Recent emphasis on improving supervisory skills may be a contributing factor. Additionally, the fact that today’s Government has an older, more knowledgeable, and more tenured workforce may play a role in reducing the rates at which PPP’s are committed and/or reported. Whatever the explanation, this downward trend is grounds for cautious optimism that Federal supervisors and other managers and their employees are internalizing merit principles and behaving in increasingly appropriate ways at work. The trend data may also be an indicator that the efforts of MSPB and other agencies that safeguard the Federal workforce are achieving success.

To understand more about the situation, we have included questions on each MPS asking participants about their experiences with specific prohibited personnel practices. **Figure 19** presents responses to questions about retaliation for whistleblowing from the present Merit Principles Survey and the preceding three most recent surveys. Here, there is also a slight decreasing trend, perhaps indicating decreased retaliation by agencies against employees who stand up for their rights.

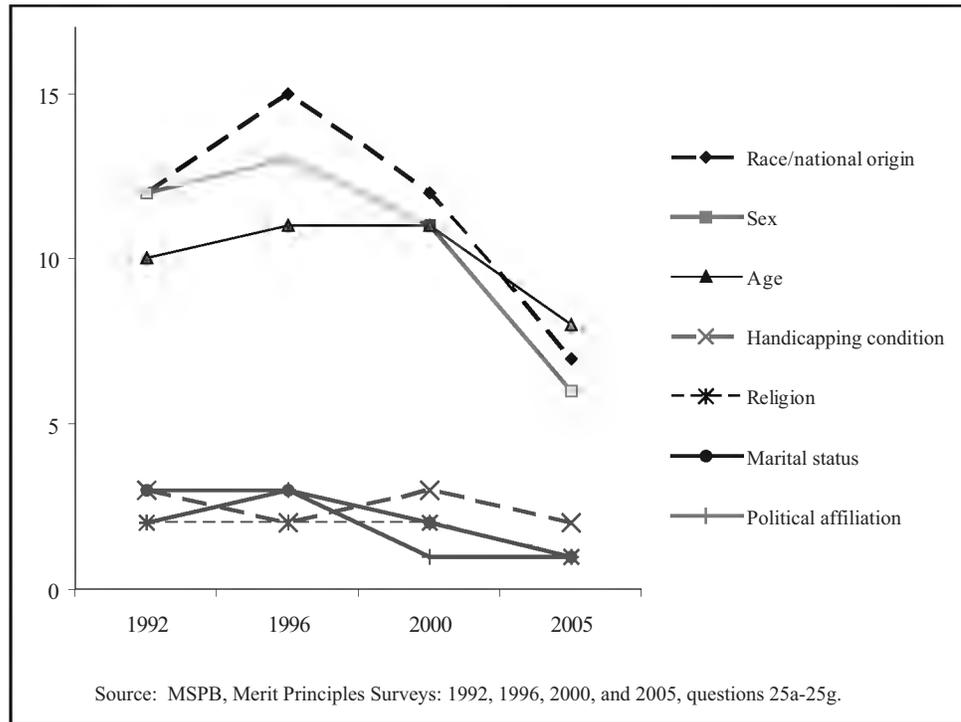
<sup>14</sup> These prohibited personnel practices are specified in 5 U.S.C. 2302.

Figure 20 presents the percentage of employees who believe they have been denied promotions for seven different nonmerit—and therefore illegal—reasons across these same four administrations of the Merit Principles Survey. Although the chart indicates decreases in all of these practices in 2005, these decreases represent very small differences and could be due to chance. Therefore, our focus should be not so much on downward trends, which may be due to chance, but on the fact that the incidence of most prohibited personnel practices is low and certainly not rising.

**Figure 19. Percent of participants responding “yes” to statements about whistleblowing and retaliation in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2005**



**Figure 20. Percent of participants saying “yes” to having been denied a job benefit because of unlawful discrimination based upon the listed reasons, in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2005**



These positive findings do not mean that agencies should rest easy. Achieving a 100 percent safety record on a factory production line does not mean workers or managers can cease their concerns about employee safety. Similarly, Federal employees at every level must continually attend to the merit principles to maintain the improving record and eventually surpass it.

## Conflict in the Workplace

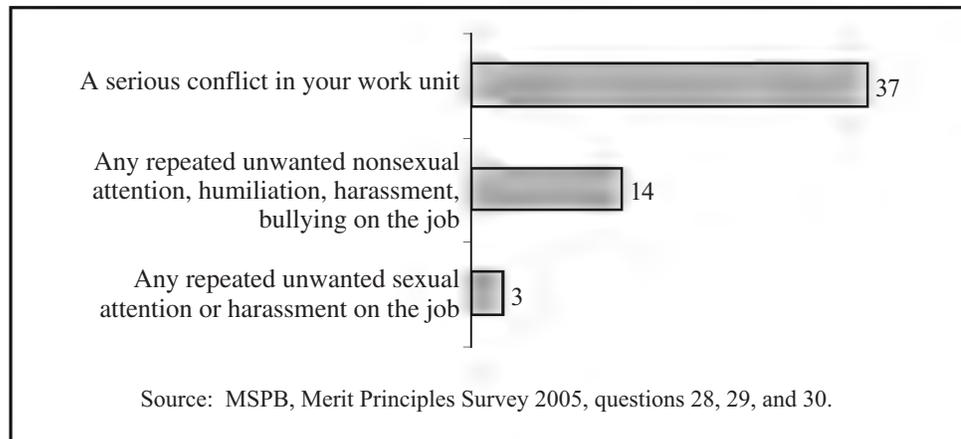
The MPS 2005 gathered information on several issues that MSPB has not studied in previous years. One such issue is conflict in the workplace. We chose to explore this issue because the way agencies, supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees identify and resolve workplace conflicts can materially affect organizational and employee performance, employee morale, and ultimately employee retention. Accordingly, the MPS 2005 included questions designed to help us better understand the prevalence of serious workplace conflict, the sources of such conflict, and how supervisors respond to it.

**Prevalence of Conflict.** The MPS asked all employees, both supervisory and nonsupervisory, whether they had experienced a serious conflict within their work units.<sup>15</sup> Survey responses from all participants confirm our suspicion that conflicts

<sup>15</sup> We provided survey participants with the following definition of *serious conflict*: “A serious conflict is one that you felt if not addressed would result in negative workforce consequences such as low morale, low organizational productivity or performance, perceived unfairness, absenteeism, attrition or even fear.”

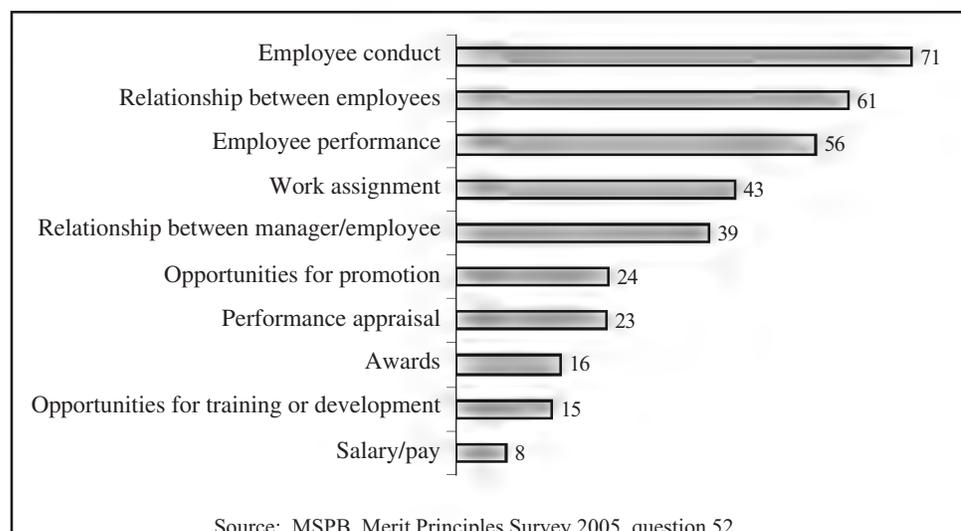
in the workplace are common. Nearly half of supervisors (49 percent) report dealing with at least one conflict during the past year. As **Figure 21** shows, more than one third of employees (37 percent) indicate that they had experienced a serious conflict in their work unit during the past 2 years. In addition, Figure 21 puts this percentage in perspective. Workplace conflicts are separate from and actually much more common than instances of individual mistreatment such as bullying and sexual harassment.

**Figure 21. Percent of participants indicating they experienced the listed incidents in the past 2 years**



**Sources of Conflict.** To understand the nature of workplace conflict, we asked supervisors which sources lead to workplace conflict. Their responses are displayed in **Figure 22**.

**Figure 22. Percent of supervisors indicating the source of a conflict they encountered in their work unit in the past 2 years**

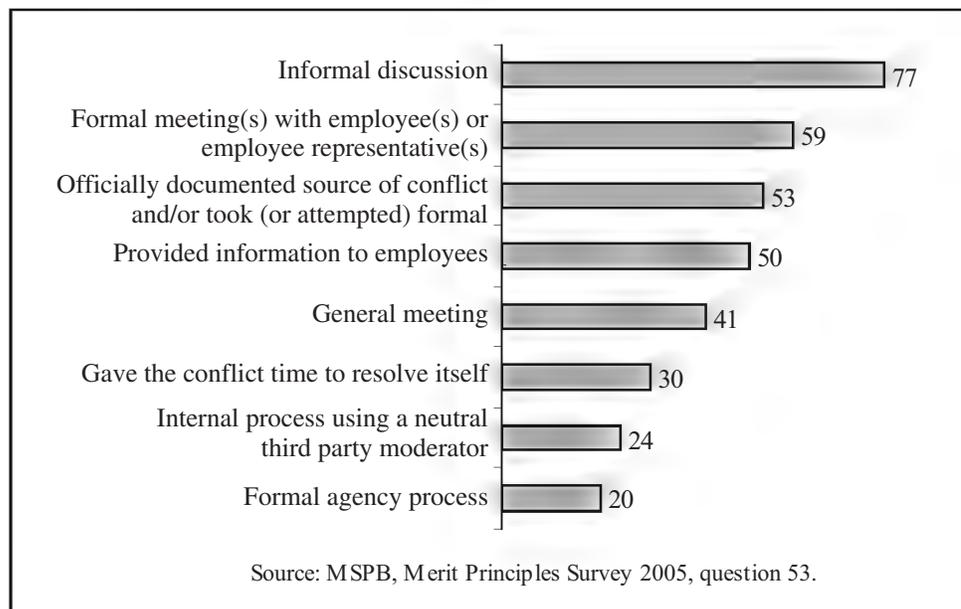


As indicated by the chart, the two most frequently reported sources of conflict are employee conduct problems (71 percent) and issues arising from relationships between employees (61 percent). The next most common sources of conflict are employee performance (56 percent), work assignments (43 percent), and problems in the supervisor/employee relationship (39 percent). Matters such as opportunities for promotion, awards, training, and salary were the least frequently cited.

These findings indicate two interesting patterns. First, serious workplace conflicts are more likely to stem from people themselves (e.g., from their conduct and work relationships) than from events or personnel actions (e.g., actions about training opportunities or awards). Second, serious conflicts are more likely to relate to local issues within the purview of the supervisor (e.g., employee relationships and work assignments) than to issues governed by agency policy or organizational structure. With this in mind, we explore how supervisors respond to workplace conflicts.

**Responses to Conflict.** Figure 23 displays the different strategies used by supervisors to resolve “the most memorable conflict within the past two years” in their work unit. The data are encouraging and speak highly of supervisor efforts to resolve conflict. The most often used tool in the supervisor’s conflict resolution repertoire is informal discussion with employees, brought into play in attempts to resolve more than three quarters of workplace conflicts (77 percent). In addition, supervisors often address conflicts by conducting formal meetings with the employee(s) involved in the conflict (59 percent), providing information (50 percent), or holding general meetings such as staff meetings or “town hall” meetings (41 percent). This seems to indicate that supervisors clearly understand the importance of communication in clarifying and resolving conflict.

**Figure 23. Percent of supervisors indicating their strategies for internally resolving conflicts**

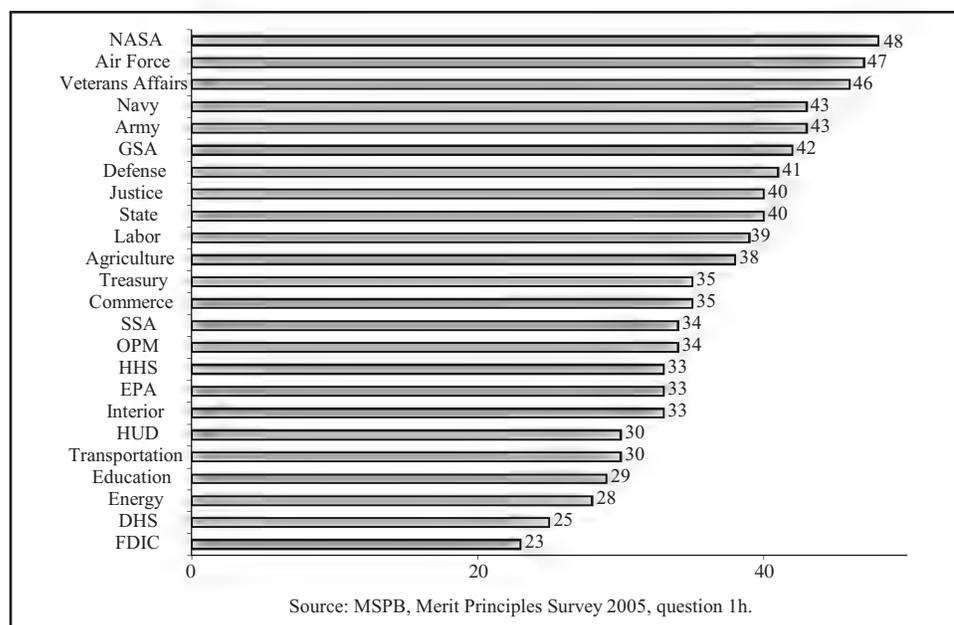


Supervisors do use formal or structured processes, such as disciplinary action (53 percent) or third-party intervention (24 percent), but less frequently than several methods focusing on communication.<sup>16</sup> Another strategy that supervisors use with some frequency is the “wait and see” approach. Nearly one-third of supervisors indicate that they simply give the conflict time to resolve itself.

The data seem to indicate that although formal conflict resolution processes are necessary and important, agencies cannot solely rely on such mechanisms to prevent or resolve workplace conflicts. The most important “mechanisms” are communication between people (i.e., first-line supervisors and their employees) and establishing an organizational culture in which there is trust between supervisors and their employees (we discuss the topic of trust in more depth in a following section of this report).

In a related question, we asked participants for their perceptions of how constructively their agency deals with workplace conflict. **Figure 24** summarizes the responses by agency. These data should not be viewed as a ranking of how well individual agencies deal with conflict. Instead, we show this data to make two points. First, the Federal Government has considerable room for improvement in dealing with workplace conflict.<sup>17</sup> There is no agency in which more than half of the employees are satisfied with the agency’s approach to conflict resolution. Second, agencies can contribute to the situation in a positive or negative way. Although

**Figure 24. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “My agency responds constructively to workplace conflicts,” by agency**



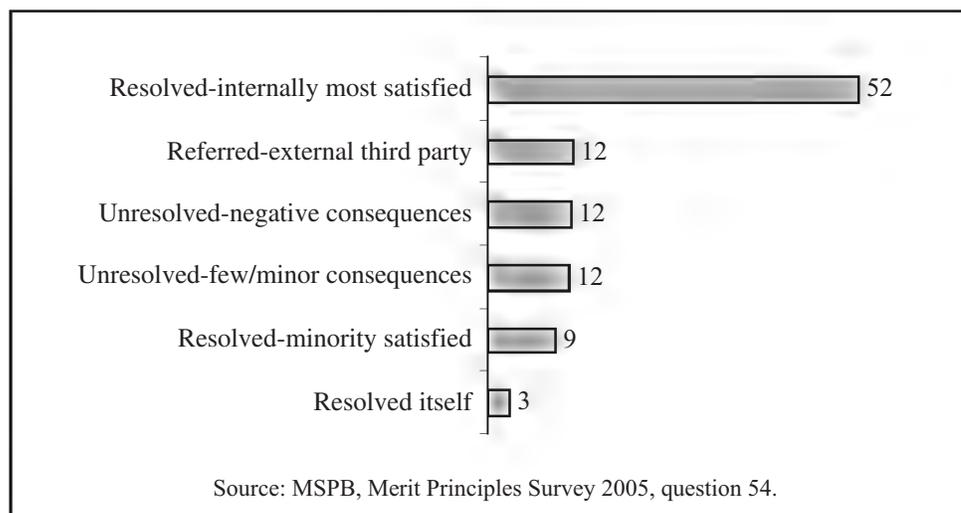
<sup>16</sup> Because our survey did not ask supervisors why they chose a particular strategy, we cannot determine how their choice was affected by factors such as the nature of the conflict, supervisory preference, or agency policy.

<sup>17</sup> Employees’ responses to this question may also reflect differences in the organization’s mission and work environment. For example, an organization with “24/7” workplace coverage requirements may be more likely to have conflicts related to work scheduling than a “9 to 5” organization—and may be perceived by employees as less flexible or constructive when such conflicts arise.

differences among agencies cannot be attributed solely to how constructively they respond to workplace conflict, the differences are large enough to make it clear that organizational culture, agency policy and practice, and supervisory and nonsupervisory employee behaviors do matter.

**Outcomes of Conflict.** Figure 25 displays the outcomes of conflicts as reported by supervisors. Just over half (52 percent) of supervisors indicate that the most recent workplace conflict they dealt with was resolved in a way that satisfied most employees, while nearly one-tenth (9 percent) indicated it was resolved in a way that left some employees dissatisfied. About one-eighth (12 percent) of the conflicts involved referral to a third party, such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Federal Labor Relations Authority, or the MSPB. Finally, a small percentage of the workplace conflicts (3 percent) resolved themselves. In one way or another, about three out of four conflicts were resolved.

**Figure 25. Percent of supervisors indicating the listed conflict outcome**

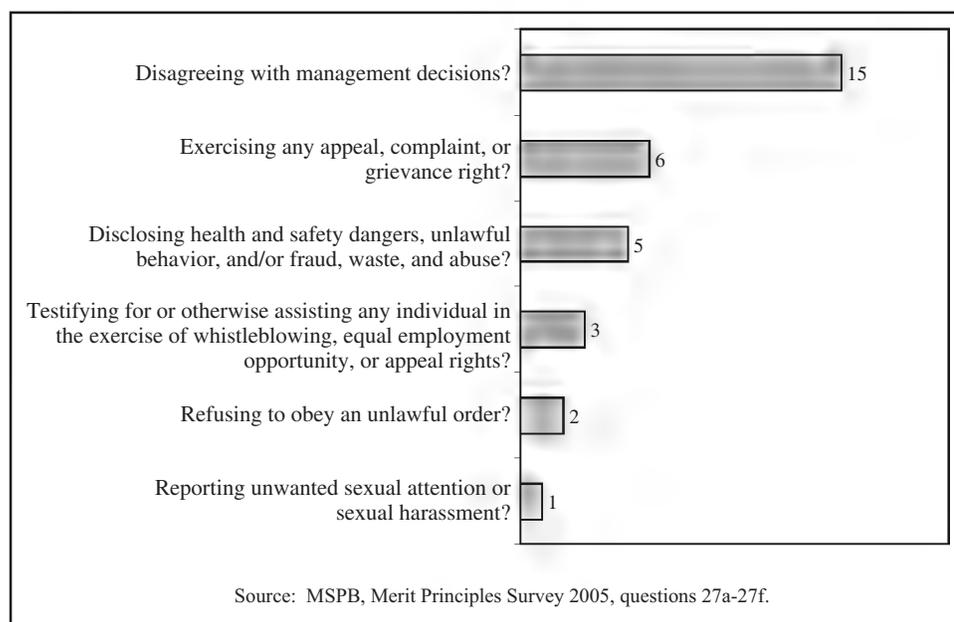


Thus, about one in four of the recent conflicts described by supervisors were unresolved. Nearly half of these unresolved conflicts—roughly 12 percent of all the serious conflicts reported by supervisors—negatively affected the performance of the work unit or the broader organization. This reinforces two points. First, agencies must have tools to manage and resolve workplace conflicts. These tools range from ensuring that supervisors and their employees are equipped with good problem-solving and interpersonal skills to instituting alternative dispute resolution to taking formal actions. Second, agencies must be willing to use those tools to resolve workplace conflicts. Although informal, low-level resolution of conflicts is generally desirable, agency leaders and other supervisors must persist in efforts to resolve conflicts—including taking formal personnel actions and third-party involvement—when informal measures are unsuccessful or inappropriate. Inaction is not an adequate response to serious workplace conflict. As shown above, few serious conflicts will simply disappear. Moreover, supervisors who take a “wait and see” approach to a serious conflict are considerably more likely to report that the conflict remained unresolved with serious consequences (17 percent) than are supervisors who use an active strategy (10 percent).

## Conflicts Related to Disagreement with Management Decisions

The MPS 2005 asked about the degree to which participants believe they were retaliated against for disagreeing with management decisions. As shown in **Figure 26**, nearly three times as many survey participants (15 percent) report that managers have retaliated against them for this reason than for engaging in activities such as whistleblowing or reporting sexual harassment (5 percent).<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 26. Percent of participants responding “yes” to the question “In the past 2 years, do you feel you have been retaliated against or threatened with retaliation for..”**



Although disagreeing with management decisions is not necessarily legally protected, Federal employees’ ability and willingness to voice constructive concerns about management decisions are nevertheless a matter of public concern. Agencies—and the American public—can benefit when managerial decisions give due weight to relevant considerations and facts, including those provided by employee subject matter experts. That cannot happen unless employees freely share their knowledge and perspectives with agency leaders and managers.

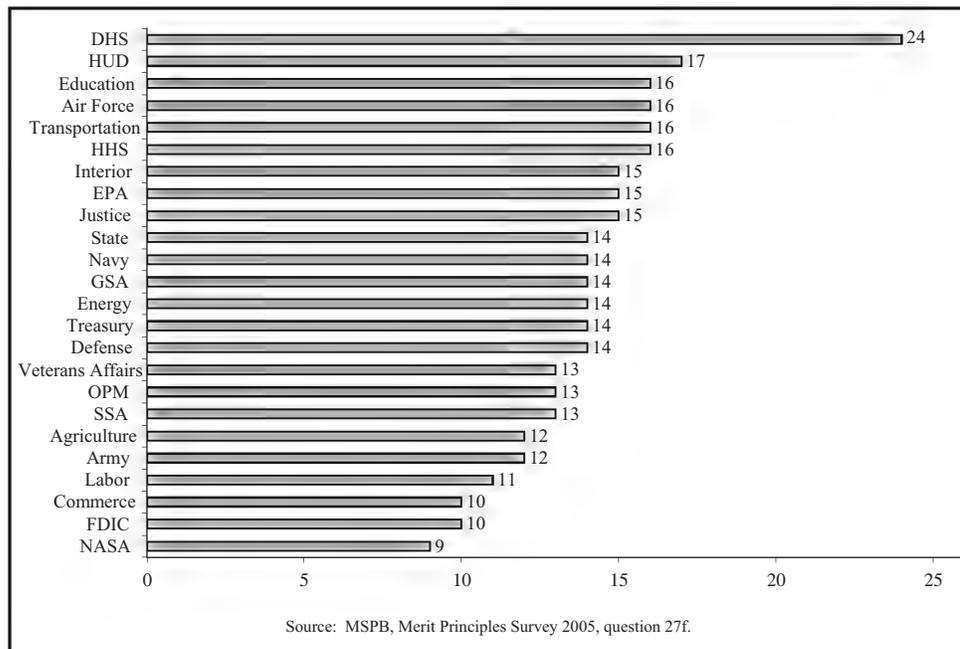
It appears that a great deal of frustration and concern surrounds this topic. MPS 2005 results indicate that many Federal employees believe their views are unheard, disregarded, or discouraged. For instance, 17 percent of survey participants disagreed with the statement “I am able to openly express concerns at work” and 22 percent disagreed with “My opinions count at work.” From the agency perspective,

<sup>18</sup> Note that the six issues listed in Figure 26 are not necessarily mutually exclusive in the minds of our survey participants or under the law. Instances of “disagreeing with management decisions” may also constitute “whistleblowing” under some circumstances. Nevertheless, our point remains that “disagreeing with management decisions” is regarded by our survey participants as a more frequent elicitor of retaliation than other issues presented on the MPS 2005.

reactions to proposed changes to personnel systems in the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense seem to suggest that there is concern about agency ability to enforce workplace rules and hold employees accountable for supporting legitimate management goals and priorities.

Figure 27 presents a cross-agency comparison of the degree to which survey participants believe they have been retaliated against for challenging management decisions.<sup>19</sup> The variation across agencies is striking, but not surprising. As noted previously, agencies have diverse missions, work environments, and organizational cultures. It would be surprising if that diversity was not reflected in differences in employee perceptions of how agencies deal with employees who disagree with management decisions.

**Figure 27. Percent of participants responding “yes” to the question “In the past 2 years, do you feel you have been retaliated against or threatened with retaliation for disagreeing with management decisions,” by agency**



However, it is also clear that the Federal Government, as a whole, can do better in dealing with these situations. Fifteen percent of survey participants report threatened or actual retaliation for disagreeing with management decisions. Improvement will require agencies to make progress in two areas. First, they must do more to foster trust and good working relationships between supervisors and

<sup>19</sup> We emphasize that these figures reflect employees’ characterization of the agency’s response to their disagreement with a management decision. Thus, the perceived “retaliation” is not necessarily inappropriate or illegal. For example, there are circumstances under which an agency may reasonably reassign or change the job duties of an employee who disagrees with a particular agency project. This may even be done with regard for the employee, the supervisor believing that the employee would appreciate not being required to work directly in support of something with which he or she does not agree. The agency may not, of course, take such action in response to an employee expression of disagreement that is protected under 5 U.S.C § 2302(b)(8).

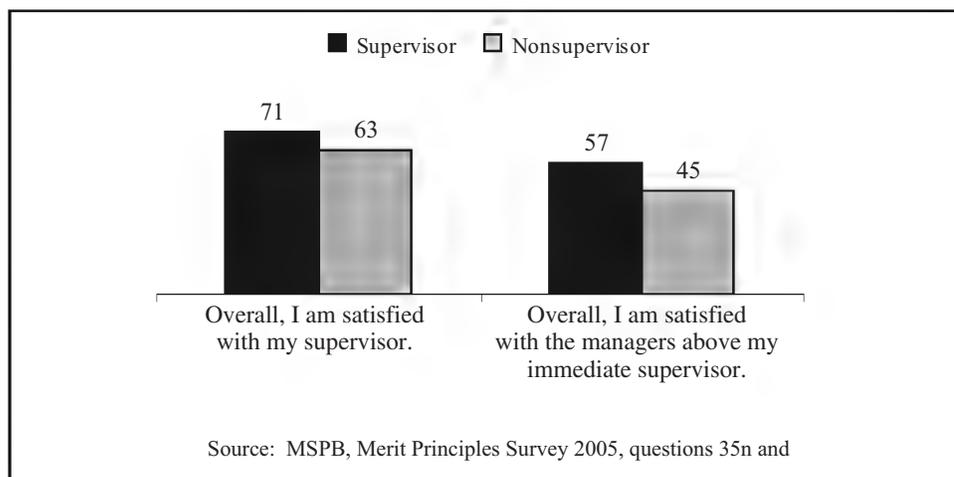
their employees to open up or improve communication and increase the opportunity to resolve disagreements more successfully. Second, agencies should establish an organizational culture that accepts reasoned disagreement while maintaining cohesion and discipline. Specifically, they could introduce guidelines and practices that protect employees from retaliation for expressing legitimate concerns while permitting managers to hold employees accountable for their performance and conduct.

In support of this approach, we note that Federal employees have guidelines for dealing with many other matters related to their employment. There are complaint procedures for EEO issues; grievance procedures for other work-related matters; ethics guidelines for conflict of interest issues; and rules for official travel and use of Government credit cards. However, we have observed that Federal employees and supervisors receive little guidance on working through questions and disagreements over management priorities, policies, or decisions. Therefore, as suggested above, it may be helpful for agencies to establish some “ground rules” for expressing and resolving disagreements related to management decisions.<sup>20</sup>

## Trust—the Key to Overcoming Barriers

Fair and equitable treatment and successful communication both build trust—and their absence can create distrust and a host of accompanying problems. We asked all survey participants about their satisfaction with their supervisors and other managers and their trust in them. The results are presented in Figures 28 and 29, respectively.

**Figure 28. Percent of participants agreeing with statements about their satisfaction with their management officials, by supervisory status**



<sup>20</sup> The Standards of Ethical Conduct for Federal Employees (5 U.S.C. 2635.101) outline general responsibilities of Federal employees, but do not discuss in detail employee rights and responsibilities in relation to agency leadership. The standards of conduct of some other nations are much more explicit. For example, Canada’s *Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service* (available at <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca>), includes statements that “Public servants shall give honest and impartial advice and make all information relevant to a decision available to Ministers,” that “Public servants shall loyally implement ministerial decisions, lawfully taken,” and that “Ministers are responsible for...maintaining the tradition of political neutrality of the Public Service and its continuing ability to provide professional, candid and frank advice.”

**Figure 29. Percent of participants indicating trust in their first- and second-level supervisors to do the listed**

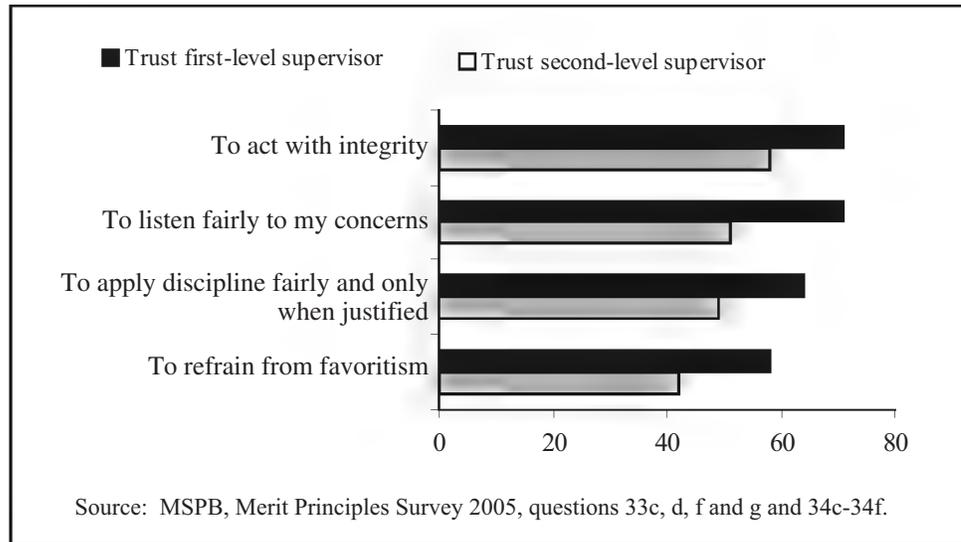


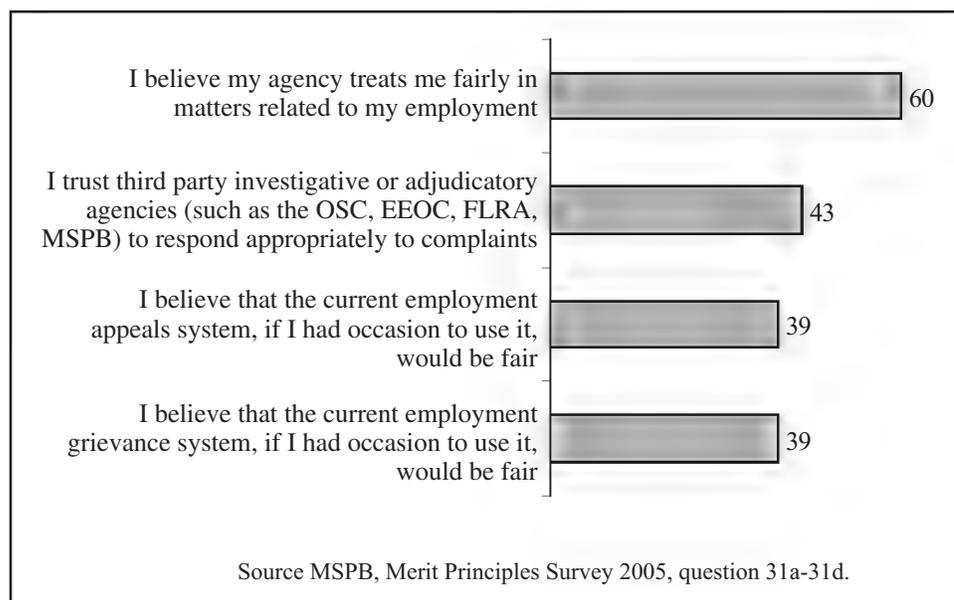
Figure 28 presents supervisors' and nonsupervisors' level of satisfaction with their immediate supervisors and with upper management. Substantial majorities of both supervisors (71 percent) and nonsupervisors (63 percent) are satisfied with their immediate supervisors. Both groups report less satisfaction with upper agency management, although supervisors report being more satisfied with higher level managers than nonsupervisors do.

Figure 29 compares participants' trust in two levels of supervisors on four specific issues. For each issue, there is a clear pattern of employees trusting their immediate supervisors more than they trust the next level of supervision. First-line supervisors are trusted more to act with integrity (by a difference of 13 percent), listen fairly to employees' concerns (by a difference of 20 percent), apply discipline fairly (by a difference of 15 percent), and refrain from favoritism (by a difference of 16 percent). Because trust is such a fundamental issue, it affects a large number of even more specific attitudes that employees have toward their supervisors, their agency, and their agency's mission. As agencies seek to revamp their personnel management systems, including implementing pay for performance compensation systems, it will be especially important for them to do more to foster and maintain the trust of their employees.

**Figure 30** expands our discussion of employee trust. We asked survey participants their views about certain internal or external interventions used to deal with issues of fair treatment. Although 6 in 10 participants believe that their agency treats them fairly in matters of employment, there is far less trust that third-party agencies (43 percent), employment appeals systems (39 percent), or employment grievance systems (39 percent) can resolve conflicts and resolve unfairness.

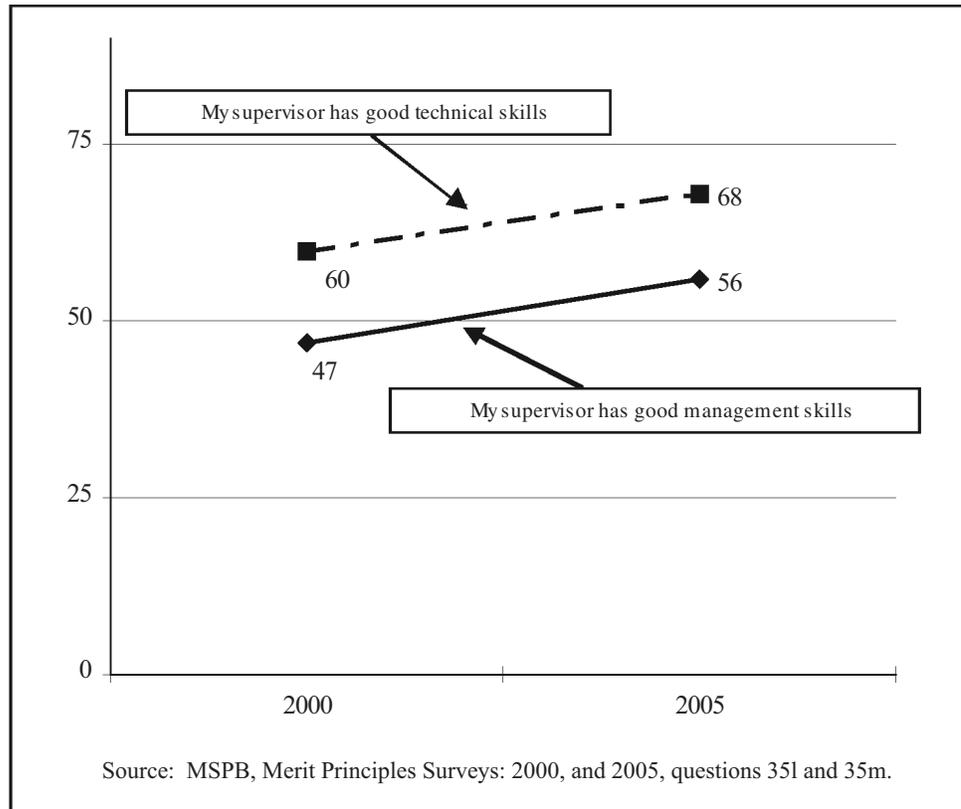
What implications do these findings have for removing barriers to the accomplishment of agency missions? The most obvious is that agency leadership and third-party investigative and adjudicatory agencies have a serious need to improve trust in their processes, and should work to do so. However, since such a small number of employees seek redress through internal or external procedures, agencies may encourage greater workforce commitment to their mission by doing all they can to strengthen and maintain trust between employees and their supervisors. To foster this relationship, supervisors themselves need to behave with integrity and make a conscious effort to gain or retain the trust of their employees.

**Figure 30. Percent of participants agreeing with the listed statements about fair treatment**



In administering the MPS 2005 we wanted to learn participants’ views about their supervisors’ qualifications. As illustrated in **Figure 31**, our survey found that more employees believe their supervisors are technically qualified (68 percent) than believe they have good management skills (56 percent). This greater respect for technical than managerial skills repeats a finding from the MPS 2000, but employees surveyed in 2005 have higher regard for both skill sets in their supervisors than MPS 2000 participants reported. In many cases, supervisors can gain their employees’ trust by building on the respect they have earned in technical areas of common experience with their employees. This “technical credibility” is a core competency in the Office of Personnel Management’s leadership competency model for several good reasons— not only does it allow managers to make better substantive decisions, but it is a basis for employee respect and improved communication. It is a building block of trust. It is also important to note that employees will also respect and trust supervisors more if supervisors’ skill in managing and communicating with their employees is strengthened.

**Figure 31. Percent of participants who agreed with two statements about their immediate supervisor, in 2000 and 2005**



A key recommendation throughout this report is that agencies, supervisors, and employees work to strengthen the trust and working relationship between supervisors and their employees. This relationship is a key element in effectively disseminating information to employees, in improving the flow of information in both directions between employees and their supervisors, and in diffusing and resolving conflicts in the workplace. It is equally crucial in identifying or expressing perceptions of unfair treatment and in eliminating such treatment. For this reason, we believe that strengthening the trust, and therefore the working relationship, between employees and their supervisors is likely to be the most effective strategy for increasing an agency's ability to accomplish its mission.



# Preserving Success

Recognizing the commitment of Federal employees to the mission of their agencies, preparing the workforce to succeed, and removing barriers to success are essential components of a successful strategy to achieve each agency's mission. Once this strategy is working, agencies must also take steps to preserve success by rewarding employee performance and by working to retain those employees who might consider leaving Federal service for opportunities elsewhere.

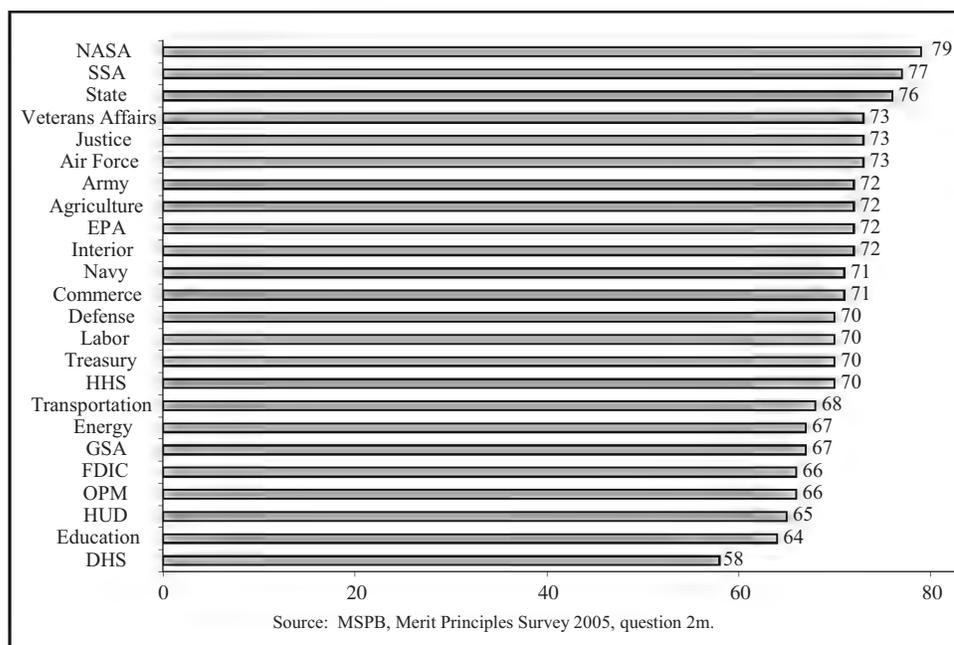
What motivates Federal employees? There is no shortage of personal opinions on this issue, ranging from the claim that public servants are uniquely inspired by their duty to their country to the belief that they are driven primarily by concerns about job security and pay. We asked employees directly about their views. The following sections present their responses to these questions and review differences between employees who are considering leaving the Federal workforce and those more likely to remain.

## Job Satisfaction and Job Security—the Bottom Line

The majority of Federal employees are satisfied with their jobs (71 percent). As with other dimensions assessed in the MPS 2005, there is a clear trend for supervisors to be more satisfied with their jobs than nonsupervisors. Beginning with moderately high job satisfaction among nonsupervisors (69 percent), satisfaction rises through the ranks, reaching its peak among the Senior Executive Service (85 percent). While it is possible that people who are more satisfied with their job to begin with are more likely to be promoted over time, it is perhaps easier to imagine that managers actually have jobs that they find more satisfying. Whatever its source, job satisfaction proves essential at all levels, and can aid the retention of high-performing employees. Hence, we should look more closely at how agencies can improve job satisfaction at all levels.

**Figure 32** presents an agency comparison of responses to the job satisfaction question. Differences in job satisfaction among agencies may have multiple causes, including some that are unique to a particular agency. For purposes of our research, it is interesting to see that, across agencies, employees with high job satisfaction also respond positively to most other attitude questions on the survey. For example, satisfied employees are highly likely to agree that their job is meaningful, they know what is expected of them, they have a real chance to improve their skills, and they would recommend their agency as a place to work. Job satisfaction is related to attitudes about so many other aspects of the workplace that job *dissatisfaction* may be due to any one or a combination of these factors.

**Figure 32. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “In general, I am satisfied with my job,” by agency**



Job security is another important factor in retaining—or preserving—a high-quality workforce. While job satisfaction and job security are related,<sup>21</sup> it is important to recognize that they are conceptually distinct. Recognizing the need to assess both concepts, we asked the MPS 2005 participants if they agree or disagree with the statement “My job is secure.” Just over half (57 percent) believe that their job is secure. Not surprisingly, more supervisors (64 percent) view their job as secure than nonsupervisors (56 percent). Fewer employees in field locations (56 percent) than those working at their agency’s headquarters (64 percent) believe their jobs are secure.

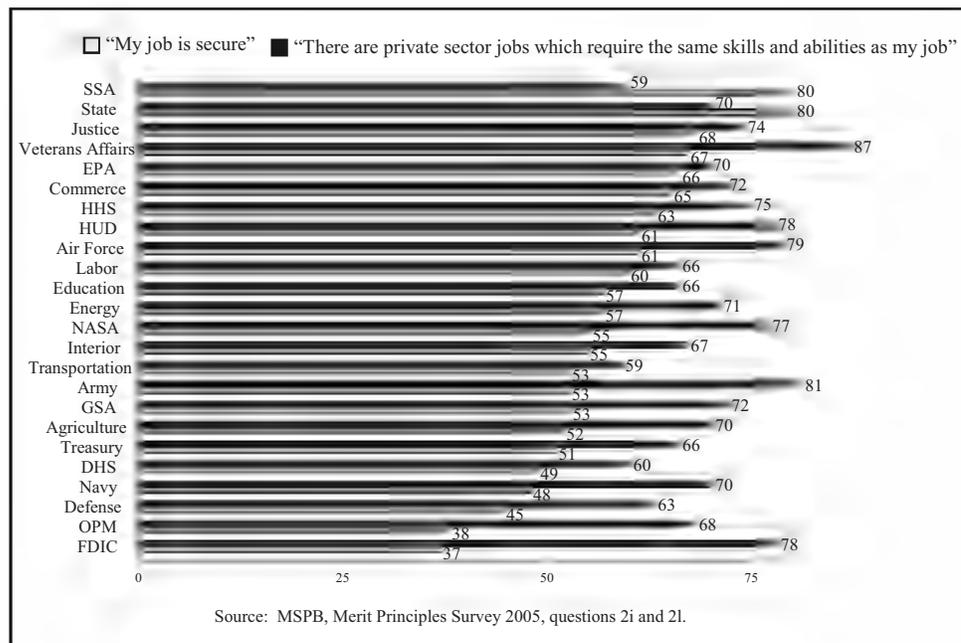
Our results also reveal a tendency for employees who do not believe their job is secure to indicate that they might change jobs to find greater job security—as one would expect. Older employees believe they have more job security than younger employees. Those closer to retirement, with more years of service, believe their jobs are more secure. Perceptions of low job security seem more closely related to specific experiences employees have had, such as believing they have been discriminated against or having failed to learn a skill in the past. It may be that asking about specific negative experiences in an employee’s recent past may be a better way to understand perceptions of job security, an approach we will consider in future Board research.

Retaining Federal employees does not depend solely on their satisfaction with their jobs and their perception of security in those jobs. Another key factor is whether they believe there are really opportunities for them elsewhere. We asked our survey participants if there are private sector jobs that require their current skills and

<sup>21</sup> The correlation between level of agreement with the statement “My job is secure” and “In general, I am satisfied with my job” is .41. This indicates a moderate tendency for employees to answer these two questions the same way. (This statistic ranges from -1.00 to 1.00, with 1.00 representing exactly the same answers to both questions.)

abilities. In response, nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of participants agreed. Supervisors are more likely to regard their skills as portable (78 percent) than nonsupervisory employees (72 percent). **Figure 33** shows a distribution of employee responses across agencies. Agencies where there are many employees who believe that there are private sector jobs that match their skills cannot pursue a retention-through-lack-of-options strategy. Their employees who are dissatisfied or believe their job is insecure may look for greener pastures. In fact, it is unlikely that Federal employees across the Government remain employed with the Government because of a lack of opportunities elsewhere.

**Figure 33. Percent of participants agreeing with two statements about job security and their skills," by agency**

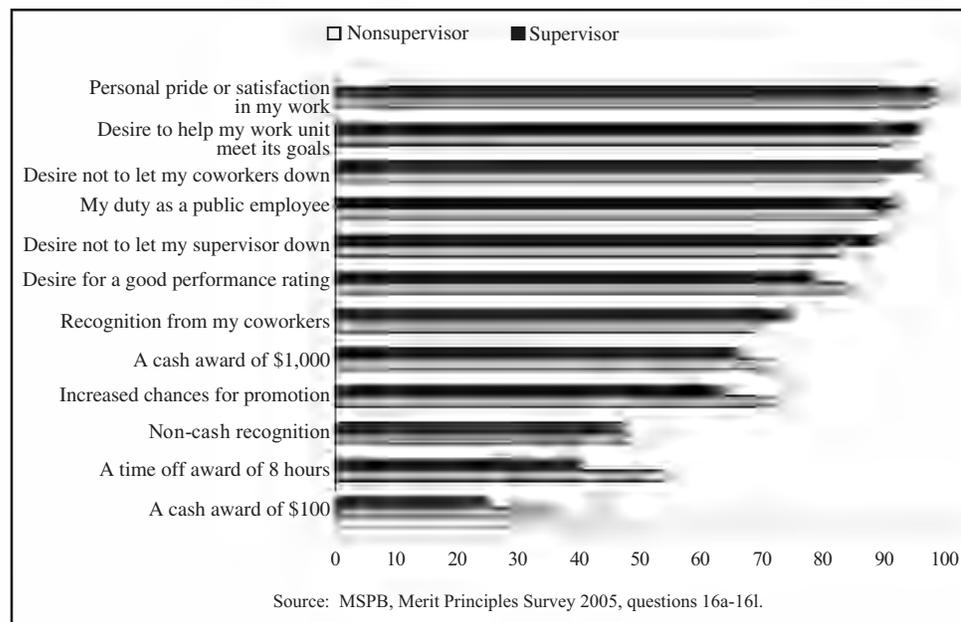


## Rewarding Successful Performance

Employees want to be recognized for a job well done—that is human nature. But there are many ways to recognize successful performance, from increasing pay to providing monetary awards to simply recognizing an employee for a job well done. There are also many challenges to face in rewarding successful performance. So what do nonsupervisory employees and supervisors say about preserving the success of the organization through rewarding performance?

**Employee Motivation.** The first step in effectively recognizing employee performance is to understand employees’ basic motivations for doing good work. This will tell us what kinds of rewards are really important to employees and will positively affect their work behavior. The MPS 2005 asked participants to rate how important 12 different factors are in motivating them to do a good job. These factors range from the very concrete awards of cash or time off to the emotional outcomes of personal satisfaction and duty as a public servant. The responses for supervisors and nonsupervisors are summarized in **Figure 34**.

**Figure 34. Percent of participants indicating the listed factors as important in motivating them to do a good job, by supervisory status**



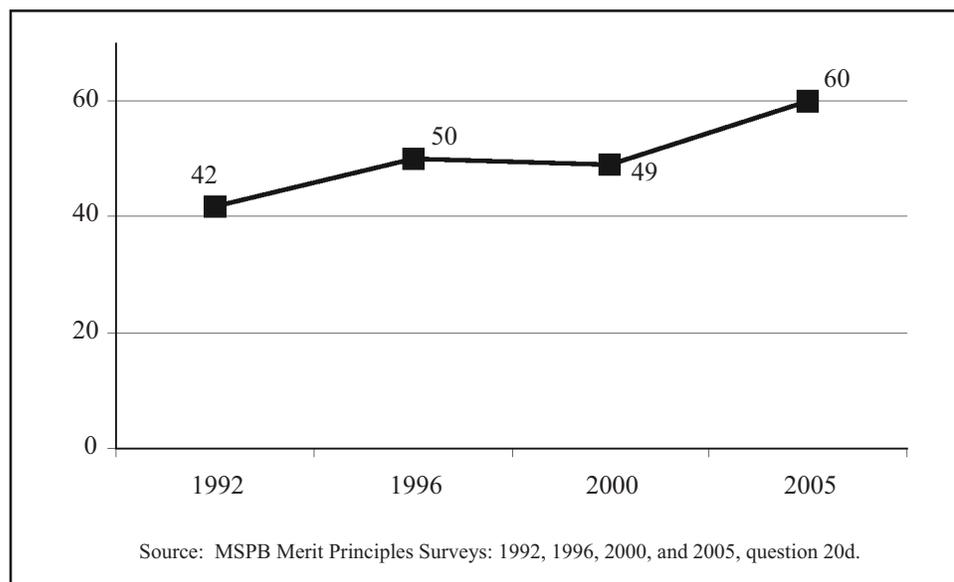
Supervisors and nonsupervisors are similarly motivated by most of the reward factors. Both groups are more highly motivated to do a good job by emotional outcomes as opposed to the more concrete cash or nonmonetary awards. Specifically, a greater number of all participants are motivated by such factors as pride in their work (98 percent) and their duty as a public employee (90 percent) than by direct rewards such as a hypothetical cash award of \$1,000 (71 percent) or increased chances of promotion (71 percent).

These findings reinforce our picture of a Federal workforce that is well motivated by personal factors. These findings also mean that it may be more difficult to externally motivate employees because they are largely driven by internal motivations. Therefore, as pointed out in our report *Designing an Effective Pay for Performance Compensation System*,<sup>22</sup> agencies should not rely solely on money to improve individual or organizational performance. They should also track and be concerned with measures of internal employee attitudes, such as employee engagement and satisfaction.

That does not mean, however, that issues of pay and monetary awards should be ignored. Over 70 percent of participants still indicate that increased chances for promotion (which could be translated as increased pay) and awards of over \$1,000 are important motivators. So, how satisfied are employees with the pay and rewards they receive from their employers?

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Designing an Effective Pay for Performance Compensation System*, Washington, D.C., March 2006.

**Figure 35. Percent of participants who agreed with the statement “Overall, I am satisfied with my current pay,” in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2005**



**Satisfaction With Pay.** While only 6 out of 10 participants (60 percent) are satisfied with their pay, the level of satisfaction has increased across the last four Merit Principles surveys, since 1992. This trend is displayed in **Figure 35**.

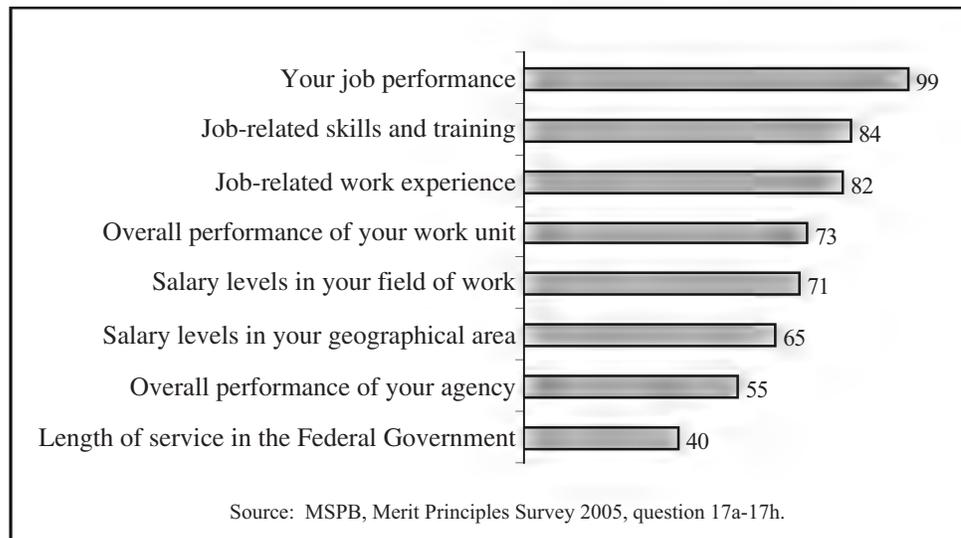
There are a number of possible reasons for this historical trend. Federal job stability, pay, and benefits may be viewed more favorably in today’s economic climate than they were during the economic boom of the late 1990’s. In addition, Federal health benefits, retirement plans, and workplace flexibilities compare favorably to those of many private sector employers, perhaps leading Federal employees to consider their pay as only one aspect of their total compensation. It is clear that, whatever the reason, Federal employee satisfaction with pay is the highest in recent history.

**Determining Pay.** To explore why Federal employees may be satisfied or dissatisfied with their pay, we asked participants what factors they think should be most important in determining their pay. The results are displayed in **Figure 36**.

The most striking finding displayed on the chart is the overwhelming agreement that pay should be largely based on factors related to the individual employee—first and foremost, individual job performance. The clear positive implication of this result is that employees support the basic concept of a system that ties financial rewards to performance.

The next two factors employees believe should determine pay are job-related skills and training and job-related work experience. Given that the top three factors are related to the individual employee, it seems clear that employees prefer to have their pay based on factors they can control. They cannot control the performance of others in their work unit or agency or the economic fluctuations that determine

**Figure 36. Percent of participants indicating the importance of the listed factors in determining cash awards and pay increases**

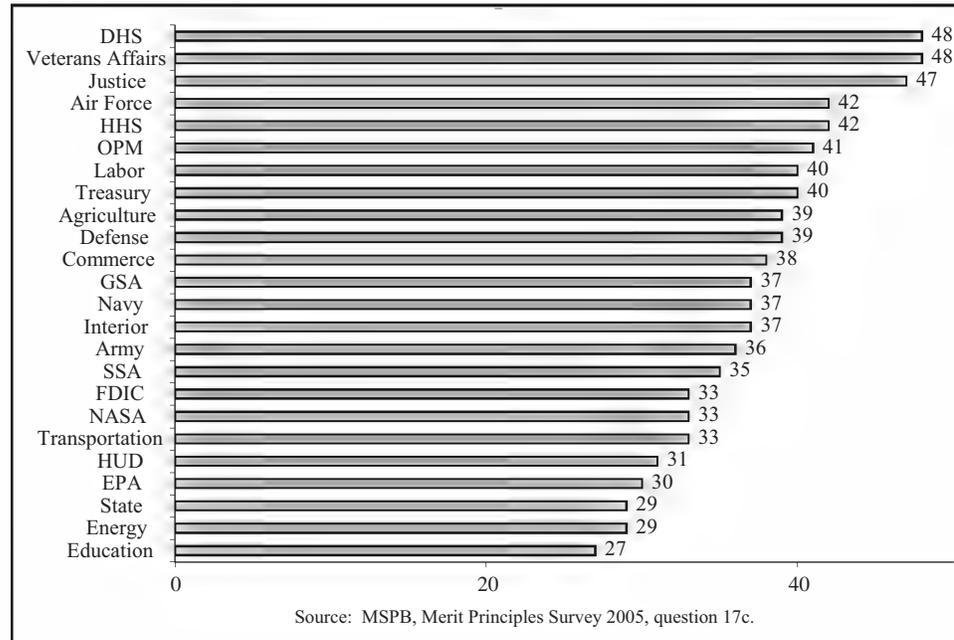


salary levels in their field or geographic location. In addition, they cannot do anything to expand their length of service, other than do their job and let time pass. In contrast, individual performance, skills, and experience are factors they can personally manage and shape in the immediate future to increase their earning potential.

These findings about personal control may help to explain why Federal employees' satisfaction with pay is not higher than 60 percent. The salary progression for a majority of Federal employees is determined by the General Schedule, which largely relies on length of service, an uncontrollable factor, rather than individual performance.

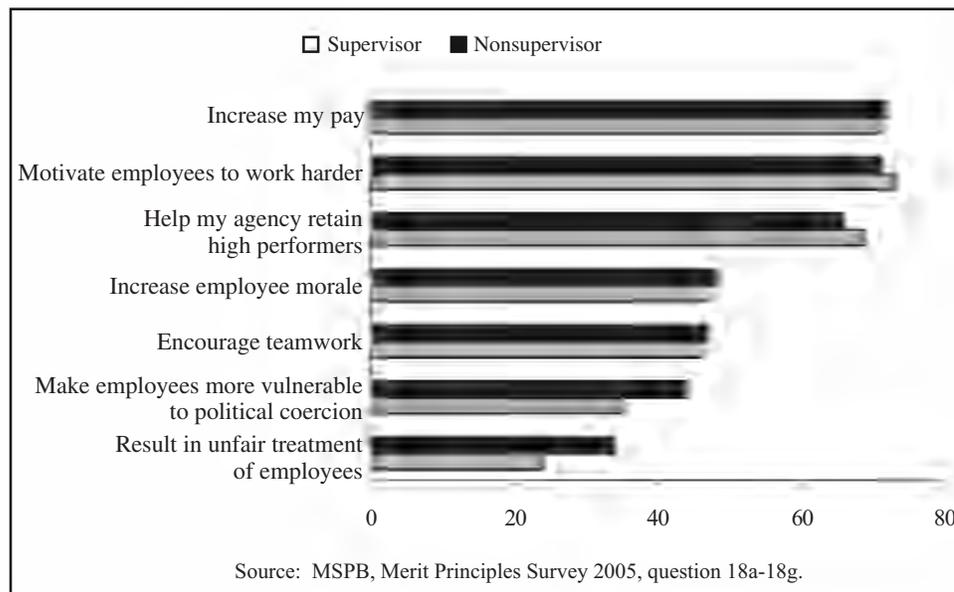
**Figure 37** shows the percentage of participants in each Federal agency who believe that length of service in the Federal Government should have an important role in determining pay. While there is no agency in which more than half of the participants seem to believe this, this idea has greater hold on some agencies than others. Agency leaders should consider the expectations of their employees about this issue and how to change these expectations if need be as they work to implement more performance-oriented reward systems in their agencies.

**Figure 37. Percent of participants saying that “length of service in the Government” should be an important factor in “determining cash awards and pay increases,” by agency**



**Barriers to Changing the Current Pay System.** As discussed above, the MPS 2005 data indicate that a large percentage of Federal employees believe that pay should be based on individual performance. In addition, employees believe that a pay for performance compensation system would be likely to increase their individual pay, motivate employees to work harder, and help retain high performers, as shown in **Figure 38**.

**Figure 38. Percent of participants agreeing that basing pay on performance would have the listed effects, by supervisory status**



The MPS results displayed in Figure 38 also indicate some mixed feelings regarding pay for performance compensation systems. While survey participants see the advantages of basing pay on performance, many also think there will be disadvantages. Many participants are concerned about the effect pay for performance will have on morale, teamwork, vulnerability to political coercion, and fair treatment.

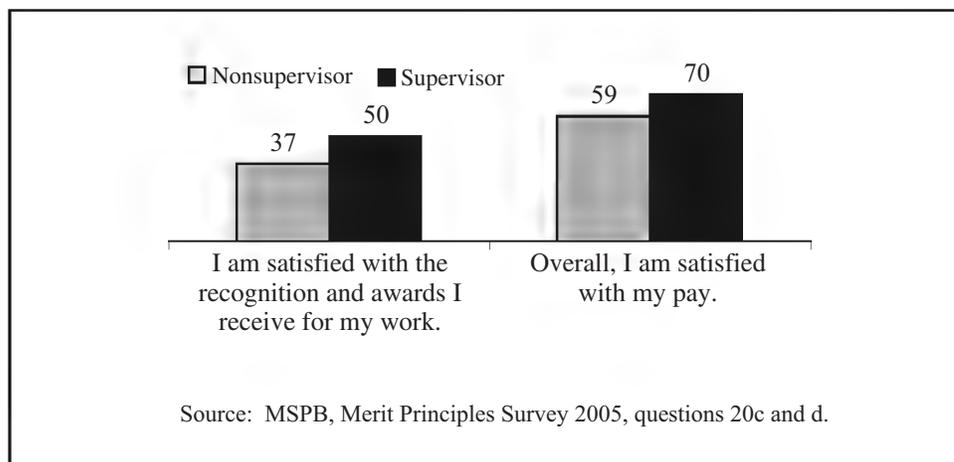
Furthermore, for employees to be satisfied with a pay for performance system, they have to believe that their performance is fairly and accurately rated and that their supervisors and managers will treat them fairly in pay decisions. Unfortunately, employees may not be able to accurately assess their own performance, a fact that makes it difficult for them to accept lower, but perhaps more realistic performance ratings by their supervisors. For example, when asked to rate their performance in comparison to others in their work unit, nearly 7 out of 10 (69 percent) survey participants rated their performance as above average. About 30 percent regarded their performance as average, while less than 1 percent of the survey participants were willing to consider their performance below average.

Although performance ratings in a particular organization are rarely distributed evenly across the range of possible ratings, these findings suggest that most employees have high expectations regarding the kind of performance ratings they deserve. This situation creates a challenge when there is a potential mismatch between supervisor ratings and employee expectations. Part of the reason for the mismatch may lie in the fact that while participants generally trust their immediate supervisor to assess their performance and contributions (71 percent), fewer participants understand how the supervisor will rate their performance (63 percent), actually believe their supervisor rates their performance fairly and accurately (62 percent), and believe that their supervisor is held accountable for rating employee performance fairly and accurately (48 percent). Finally, barely a majority trust their supervisor to support them in pay and award discussions with upper management (58 percent).

Employee relationships with upper management may also affect their attitude toward pay for performance. In a pay for performance system, upper management generally has a role in determining pay increases, although the extent of this influence on individual pay raises varies widely. MPS 2005 survey data indicate that not even half of our participants trust upper management to fairly assess their performance and contributions (49 percent) and refrain from favoritism (42 percent) in management decisions. So while Federal employees appear to support the concept of pay for performance, attitudinal changes must occur at the organizational level for this type of system to work as well as possible. Until employees trust that their performance will be accurately rated and that they will be treated fairly, without regard to factors other than their performance, they will continue to fear change.

**Recognition.** Although a sizable minority of survey participants are not satisfied with their pay, even more are dissatisfied with the recognition and awards they receive for their work with only 4 in 10 (39 percent) participants reporting being satisfied. **Figure 39** demonstrates that this general dissatisfaction with recognition and awards exists for both supervisors and nonsupervisors, and that nonsupervisors are less satisfied with both pay (59 percent) and recognition and awards (37 percent) than supervisors (70 percent and 50 percent, respectively).

**Figure 39. Percent of participants agreeing with statements about pay and rewards, by supervisory status**

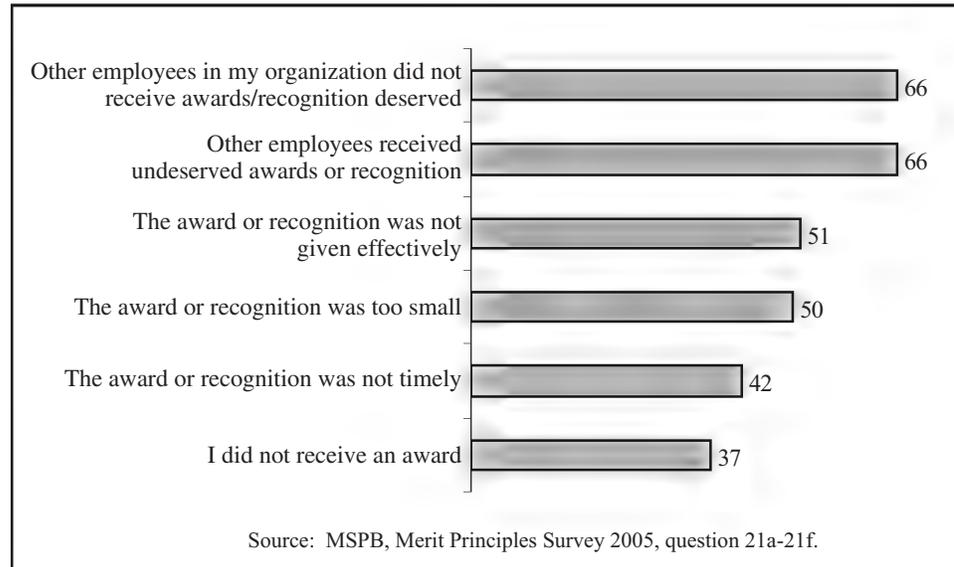


Recall from our discussion of employees' motivation that personal or "internal" motivators, such as pride in their work and doing their duty as a public servant, are more important than monetary rewards, such as \$1,000 in cash or rewards related to money, such as improved chances for promotion. Although our data show how highly employees value adequate pay for their performance, it is also clear that recognition for their contribution is a key motivator for Federal employees.

**Figure 40** contains responses to a follow-up question asked of those participants who were not satisfied with the awards and recognition they received. While many participants were not satisfied with the size of the award (57 percent), many others were concerned with intangible aspects of the award or recognition—that it was not given effectively (59 percent) or in a timely manner (48 percent). Two-thirds of participants report dissatisfaction with the way recognition and awards are distributed among their coworkers—for instance, that other employees received underserved recognition (75 percent) or that deserving employees were left unrecognized (75 percent).

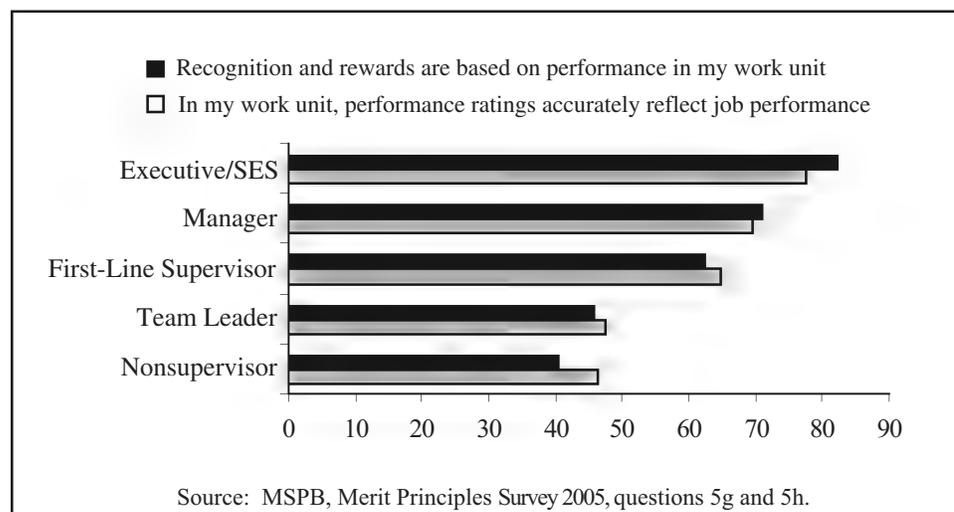
Therefore, while the size of an award or recognition matters—recall the greater number of participants motivated by \$1,000 than by \$100—the intangible aspects of awards and recognition seem more motivating. It may even be as important to recognize employees for their performance as it is to pay them well.

**Figure 40. Percent of participants indicating the listed factors contributed to a great or moderate extent to their dissatisfaction with the recognition and awards they received**



**Figure 41** contrasts the differing views about recognition for performance of nonsupervisory employees and managers at four levels of supervisory responsibility. Immediately apparent is the dramatic difference in the views of employees at different levels of supervisory responsibility concerning the linkage between performance and recognition and awards. As we have seen, both supervisory employees and nonsupervisory employees express relatively low satisfaction with the recognition and awards they receive.

**Figure 41. Percent of participants agreeing with the listed statements about recognition and performance, by level of responsibility**

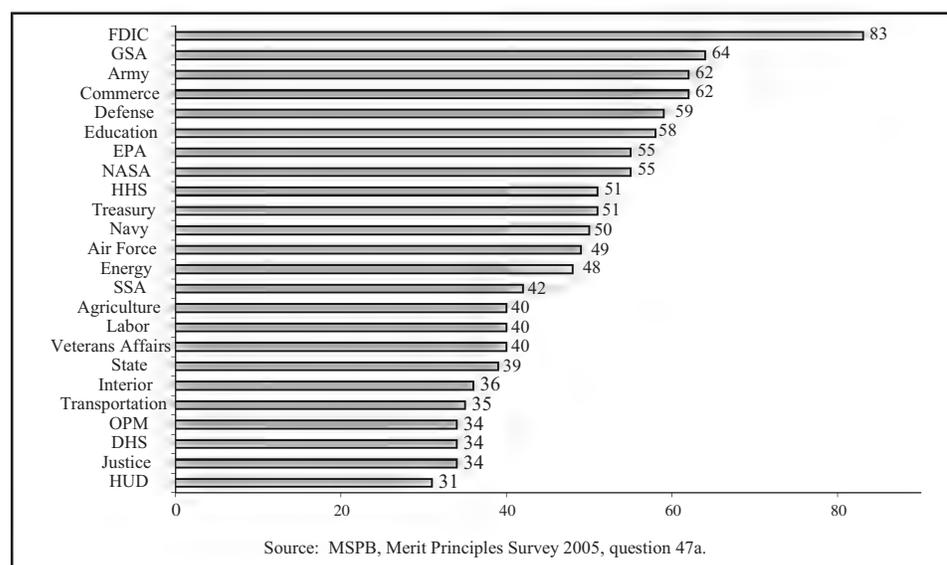


The differences in perception between nonsupervisors and supervisors at every level are likely to affect whether agency decision makers recognize this as an issue. From team leaders to executives, those at any of the four levels of supervisory responsibility need to take this nonsupervisory employee dissatisfaction seriously and not make the—quite understandable, but serious—mistake of assuming their own relative satisfaction with the status quo is shared by those they lead.

**Barriers to Successful Awards and Recognition.** As we pointed out in our report *Designing an Effective Pay for Performance Compensation System*, for a pay for performance system to be effective, employees must value the pay the organization offers in return for high performance. The same is true of recognition and awards. Employees must value the rewards they receive in return for their hard work for the system to be viewed favorably. The fact that our data showed all employees valuing intangibles above awards and recognition does not negate this principle.

We asked supervisors if they had sufficient resources and authority to reward high performance. Overall, fewer than half of supervisors believe their agency has the resources to reward high performers (47 percent), and a slightly lower percent say they have the authority to actually draw on these resources to reward high performance (43 percent). **Figure 42** compares responses regarding sufficiency of funds for the 24 agencies we surveyed. Clear differences are revealed across agencies in supervisor perceptions about available funds.<sup>23</sup> The two measurements are both important because agencies cannot effectively use recognition and awards to reward and motivate employees unless they first ensure that sufficient resources are available to make the recognition and awards valuable to the employee and that their supervisors have the authority to make full use of those resources.

**Figure 42. Percent of participants agreeing with the statement “My organization has sufficient funds to appropriately reward high performance,” by agency**



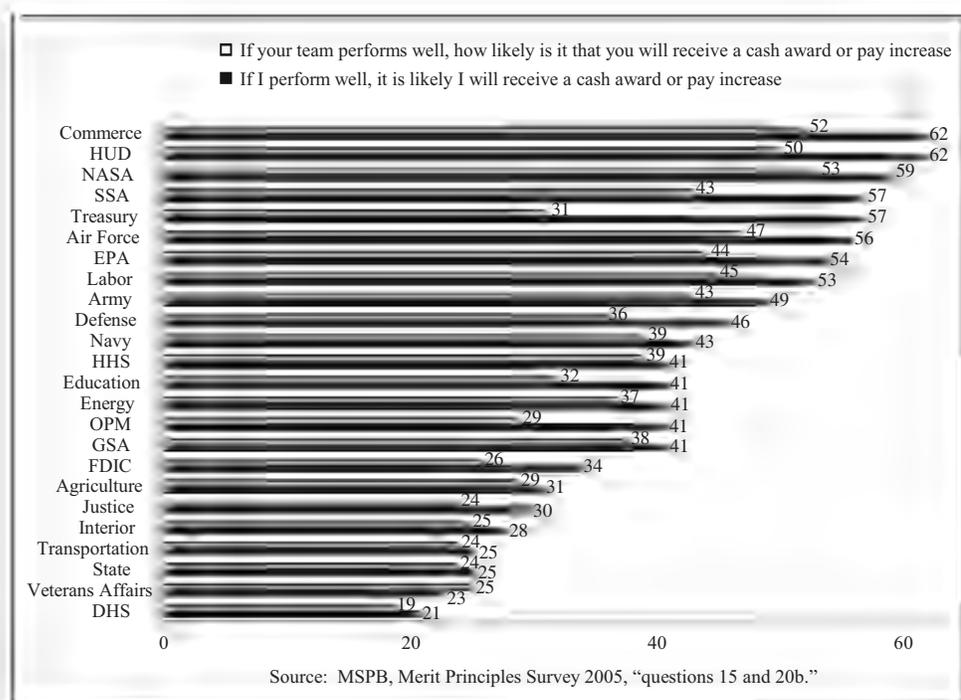
<sup>23</sup> Note that FDIC is covered by the Financial Institutions Reform, Recovery, and Enforcement Act of 1989, which granted the agency the authority to develop its own pay system.

**What role does teamwork play in rewarding performance?** One of the challenges that both supervisors and nonsupervisors face is distinguishing between individual performance and contribution to team achievement. Most Federal employees work in a team environment, but are rewarded, promoted, and hired into their next jobs as individuals. As previously discussed, employees at all levels believe that individual performance should be more important to determining pay than the outcomes of the work unit or agency.

Finally, employees appear to believe that individual performance is valued in their agency somewhat more than team contributions. When asked about the likely outcomes of team contributions and individual performance, 34 percent of participants indicate that if their team performs well, they will receive an award or pay increase. At the individual level, participants were a little more likely to believe they would receive an award or pay increase if they performed well (40 percent). However, these Governmentwide percentages do not provide the complete picture.

**Figure 43** compares the responses of participants in different agencies to our survey questions about the rewards of individual and team performance. The results are telling. In only a single agency (Veterans Affairs) is there a greater percentage of participants who believe they are likely to be rewarded for team performance than for individual performance. The rest of participating agencies show “competition gaps” ranging from a few percentage points to much larger differences.

**Figure 43. Percent of participants agreeing with the listed statements about rewards, by agency**



Agencies should consider this information in addressing the amount of competition their culture encourages between employees and work units, as opposed to encouraging cooperation to achieve the overall agency mission. For instance, while 65 percent of participants indicate that a spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in their work unit, only 53 percent said the same for cooperation between work units. Agencies need to consider that this apparent focus on individual performance may come at the cost of cooperative behavior at the work unit and agency level. Unchecked, this tendency may be a threat, rather than a facilitator, to agency mission accomplishment.

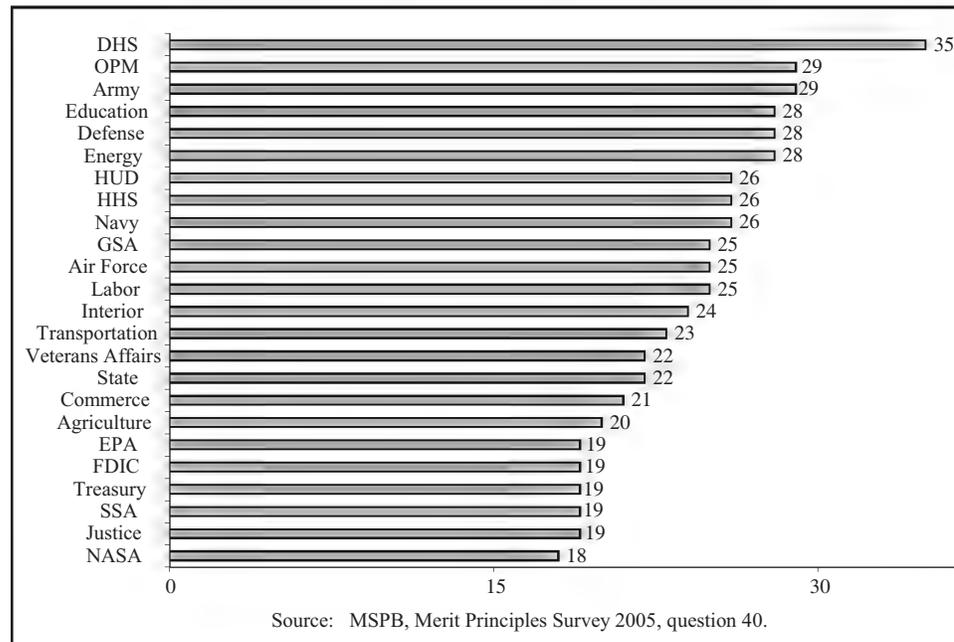
## Retaining Successful Performers

It goes without saying that, having prepared their employees to succeed and worked to remove barriers to that success, agencies prefer that successful employees remain in the agency to contribute to its mission. Even though many employees who leave their agency contribute elsewhere in the Federal Government, agency leaders prefer to have their investments in time and talent bring returns where the investment was made.

Because there has been much discussion in recent years about the impending human capital crisis in which large numbers of Federal employees are anticipated to retire, we will focus this section on the retirement issue. As previously mentioned, the Office of Personnel Management has projected that 60 percent of the Federal workforce will be eligible to retire over the next 10 years. To get a sense of likely turnover in the near future, we asked our survey participants how likely they were to leave their agency in the next 12 months.

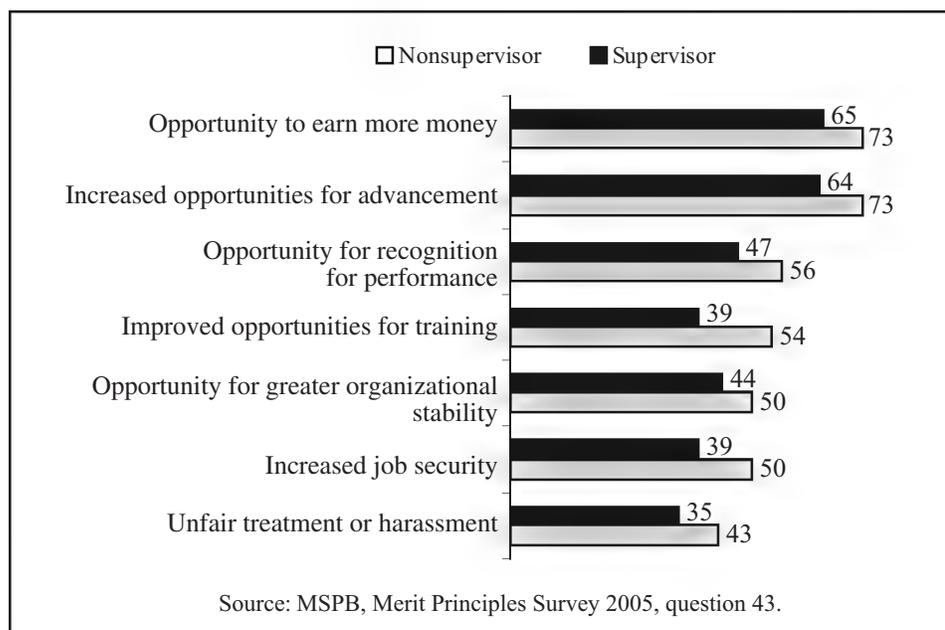
About one quarter (24 percent) indicated that they were likely to leave their agency in the next year. Of those planning to leave, just under a third (31 percent) planned to retire from Federal service, just over a third (38 percent) planned to move to another job within the Federal Government, a small number (5 percent) planned to resign from Government employment, and the remaining quarter (25 percent) were unsure about their plans. **Figure 44** presents the percentage of participants who expect to leave each agency in the next year. Clearly some agencies face more potential turnover than others, although no agency has more than a third of its workforce planning to leave in the next year.

**Figure 44. Percent of participants saying “likely” to the question “How likely is it that you will leave your agency in the next 12 months,” by agency**



Why are some employees planning to leave their agency? We asked our survey participants who were planning to leave to indicate the importance of seven common reasons for leaving a job. **Figure 45** displays some of the responses to this question for supervisors and for nonsupervisory employees. Both types of employees who plan to leave are primarily concerned with two related goals—the opportunity to earn more money (65 percent of supervisors and 73 percent of nonsupervisors) and having increased opportunities for advancement (64 percent and 73 percent for supervisors and nonsupervisors, respectively). A sizable minority (43 percent of nonsupervisors and 35 percent of supervisors) cited unfair treatment or harassment as a reason for leaving. Therefore, it is again clear that agencies still need to work toward the goal of eliminating the perception of unfair treatment of employees through trust-building efforts and better communication.

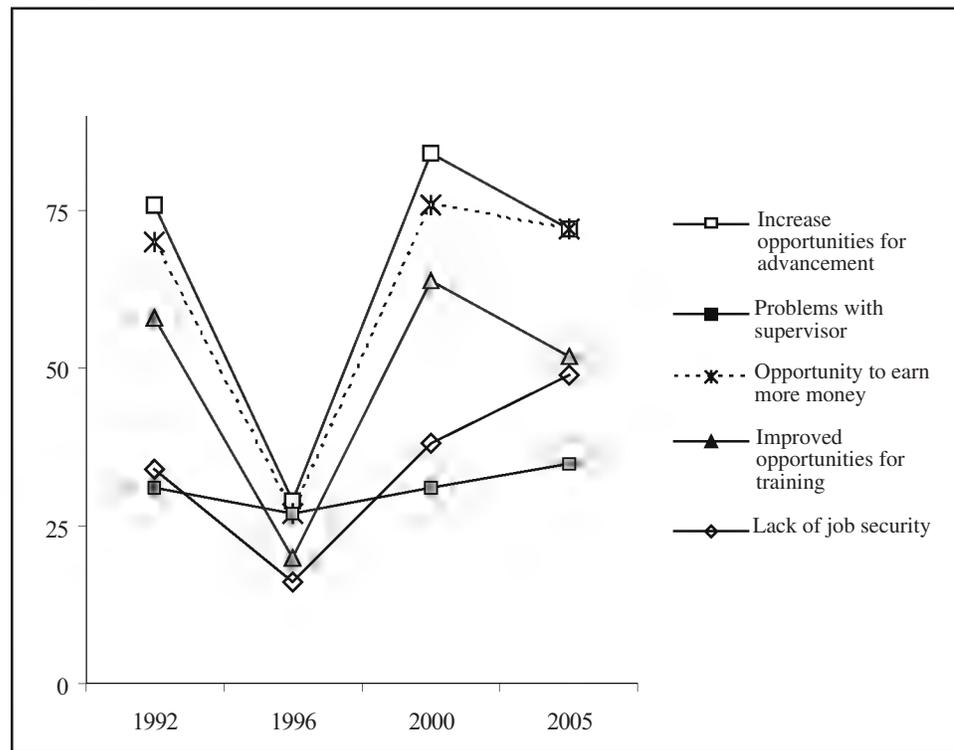
**Figure 45. Percent of participants who indicated that if they left their agency, the listed factors would be important in their decision to leave, by supervisory status**



**Figure 46** tracks the factors that survey participants cite as possible reasons for leaving their current agency across the last four administrations of the Merit Principles Survey, from 1992 to the most recent MPS 2005. Interestingly, the rank ordering by frequency remains remarkably consistent across survey administrations. Increasing opportunities for advancement and the desire to earn more money are the reasons participants most frequently cited as important in a decision to leave their agency.

Considering that a sizable portion of the workforce is becoming eligible to retire in the next few years, it is interesting to investigate whether retirement-eligible employees differ from other employees. This could be an important question for agency leaders who want to persuade employees with valuable experience to remain with the agency. Retention of such retirement eligibles helps in two ways. First, these employees can continue to make valuable contributions to the organization. But perhaps even more importantly, their retention gives the agency more time to transfer their knowledge to the next generation workforce. Unfortunately, what we have found is that there do not seem to be many distinct leverage points to convince retirement-eligible employees to stay, although there are a few, as discussed below. Overall, our survey data reveal that retirement eligible employees are not that different from nonretirement eligible employees. They believe equally that the mission of their agency is important (95 percent), and that the work they do is meaningful (87 percent retirement eligible, 86 percent nonretirement eligible), and that they are satisfied with their job (71 percent), pay (61 percent eligible, 60 percent noneligible), and supervisor (64 percent eligible, 65 percent noneligible).

**Figure 46. Trends of participants citing how important the listed factors would be in a decision to leave, in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2005**



We found that both groups also tend to be motivated by the same top factors—pride in their work, desire to help the work unit meet its goals, and duty as a public servant. However, as shown in **Table 3**, retirement-eligible employees are much less motivated than nonretirement eligibles by awards, chances for promotion, and the desire for a good performance rating. It is understandable that someone who is seriously considering retirement may not be as motivated by these factors because he or she is looking toward a future that does not depend on these factors. For an employee who plans to retire within a year or two, a performance rating has less relevance and even a promotion may make a negligible contribution to retirement salary (which is based on the highest—often the most recent—3 years of pay).

**Table 3. Percentage of participants citing factors that motivate employees to do a good job, by retirement status**

	Retirement Eligible (%)	Not eligible (%)
Cash award of \$1,000	66	73
Increased chances for promotion	58	74
Desire for a good performance rating	79	84

We also asked our survey participants in the two retirement status groups to rank how important different workplace factors would be to a decision to leave their agency. Again, as seen in **Table 4**, there was little difference in the ranking of these factors by retirement eligibles and other employees—the top four factors that would be important to a decision to leave were the same for both groups. What is noteworthy, however, is the difference in the level of agreement between the two groups. While they ranked the same factors as the top four in importance, the difference between the two groups ranged from 21 to 32 percent. Particularly striking is the fact that no factors were important to more than 50 percent of the retirement eligibles. This seems to indicate that these workplace factors would have less influence in these employees' decision to retire, making it more difficult to use them to find convincing leverage for them to stay.

**Table 4. Percentage of participants citing factors that would be important in a decision to leave their agency, by retirement status.**

	Retirement Eligible (%)	Not Eligible (%)
Opportunity to better use skills and abilities	50	77
Opportunity to earn more money	49	78
Desire to make more of a difference	46	67
Increased opportunities for advancement	46	78

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, we did find other differences between retirement eligibles and other participants, specifically regarding fairness of training and career advancement opportunities. For instance, though retirement eligibles believe that they have less need for training than other participants (39 percent versus 50 percent, respectively) and are less motivated by promotions, they are more likely to believe that they are treated unfairly in terms of training (42 percent versus 36 percent) and career advancement (39 percent versus 29 percent). Furthermore, they were more likely to report being denied job benefits due to age (13 percent versus 6 percent).

So, it appears that when employees become retirement eligible, they may unconsciously (or even consciously) be preparing to leave the workforce by partially shifting their priorities and what they value. While they are still committed to their employer, satisfied with their job, and concerned about being recognized for their work and properly prepared for their job, they seem to be less engaged in terms of motivation and concerns about everyday workplace factors. Similarly, their organizations may also be preparing for their departures by not investing as much in their training and career progression. Therefore, if agencies wish to encourage valuable employees to stay past the time they are eligible to retire, they need to attend to those interested in furthering their skills (50 percent) and career opportunities (46 percent) and those who believe that they are not treated fairly with

regard to training and career advancement. Although these factors are unlikely to change the minds of many of those who are eligible for retirement, they appear to be some of the few points of leverage that agencies can use to persuade retirement eligibles to stay.

Given the challenges of retaining a workforce with all the desired knowledge and experience, agencies may want to try to implement workforce planning strategies that are better tailored to meet the circumstances of individual employees. This means tracking the retirement eligibility of the workforce, identifying those retirement eligibles who are critical to keep and those who are not, and “re-recruiting” needed employees on an individual basis. Supervisors may also ask critical retirement eligible employees what the agency can do to keep them. This simple and direct approach could also be used for other critically needed employees regardless of their retirement status. Not only may this help the agency identify how to keep highly valued employees at any stage of their career, but the individual recognition will undoubtedly be appreciated. In cases where the suggested strategy is insufficient to retain the valued skills, agencies should also be proactive in identifying other sources of these skills and plan accordingly to replace retirement eligible employees. Preferably their planning should build in an overlap period to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills between the incumbent who is retiring and the successor.

## Some Perspective on Survey Data

Before offering our conclusions and recommendations, it is important that we express two cautions regarding interpretation of survey results. First of all, it is important to keep in mind that the data reviewed in this report, as well as that from other Governmentwide, agencywide, and private sector surveys, are based on employee perceptions. Even questions about objective facts, such as the number of levels in an agency’s performance appraisal system, are reported to us through the perceptions and memories of Federal employees who respond to our surveys. We have to consider the implications of this as we use the results of this survey to recommend needed changes in the work environments of public servants.

The second lesson is that perceptions are reality for those who hold them. For example, if employees who perceive that their jobs are not secure are mistaken, it does not really matter. They will still look for another job. And the confused supervisors left behind, who did not communicate effectively with these employees, may learn this lesson too late. Similarly, all of those employees who believe their performance is above average may benefit from improved, ongoing communication with their supervisors, too, if they are to understand why their performance ratings are not always what they expect.

Our goal in conducting this survey is to provide information that will help agency leaders, supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees understand each others’ perceptions, as well as the realities, of their workplace. We also hope agencies will then use this information to help create a satisfying and successful workplace in which all employees make their full contribution to accomplishing their agency’s mission.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Conclusions

The results of the Merit Principles Survey 2005 provide a useful context for exploring how agencies manage their employees to achieve organizational goals. The perspective of our survey participants is that the Federal Government does a fairly good job managing its workforce—though there are areas in which improvements could help the Government better manage the workforce to accomplish its diverse missions. Based on what we have learned from our survey participants, MSPB offers the following conclusions and recommendations.

**Federal employees are committed to and understand their agency’s mission.** Employees’ ability to carry out their responsibilities in supporting their agency’s work depends on both their personal commitment to the organization and their understanding of what the organization aims to accomplish. We found that Federal employees excel in both areas. They understand the mission of their agency and believe that the mission is important. On an individual level, employees understand how their work contributes to the agency’s overall mission and find the work they do personally meaningful. This high level of engagement can serve as the cornerstone to necessary management improvements.

**There are barriers to preparing the workforce to accomplish the agency’s mission.** To help agencies accomplish their missions, Federal employees must possess the skills and abilities needed to do their jobs. Agencies can ensure that the workforce has the necessary skills by: (1) recruiting for these skills and/or (2) training for them. Unfortunately, there are obstacles to both strategies.

From the recruitment standpoint, first-line supervisors and other hiring officials participating in our survey are concerned that they are not receiving highly qualified applicants. This quality problem may be due to insufficient recruitment strategies or incentives, the slowness of the hiring process, or the use of inadequate assessment instruments. From the training standpoint, survey participants generally believe they receive the training they need to perform the basic functions of their jobs. They report that they need additional training to perform their jobs more effectively. There may be several reasons an agency does not provide the additional training, from budgetary or time constraints to questions of whether the training will actually help further its mission.

**Employees generally believe they are treated fairly in matters related to their employment, though the data indicate a moderate level of workplace conflict.** A majority of survey participants believe that their agency treats them fairly in matters related to employment. Employees also report generally fewer prohibited personnel practices during the 2 years preceding the survey than at any other time in the two decades 1985 through 2005. This finding is grounds for cautious optimism that the efforts of supervisors and agencies that safeguard the Federal workforce are achieving success.

However, there are areas of discord that cause concern. For instance, nearly half of the supervisory participants report dealing with at least one serious workplace conflict during the past year, and more than one-third of nonsupervisory employees had experienced a serious workplace conflict during the past 2 years. Fortunately, the data speak highly of supervisor efforts to clarify and resolve conflicts through open communication, using such means as informal discussions with their employees, formal meetings, providing information, or general meetings.

Fair treatment and successful communication both build trust, and their absence may create distrust and a host of accompanying problems. Survey results provide evidence that employees tend to trust their immediate supervisors, but not necessarily their upper level management. Therefore, the key to reducing perceived unfairness and workplace conflict may lie in further strengthening employees' relationship not just with their first-line supervisors, but also with higher levels of management.

**Agencies may face challenges in preserving a high-quality workforce.**

Once agencies are committed to success, prepare for success, and attempt to overcome obstacles to success, they must take steps to preserve success by rewarding employee performance and by working to retain valued employees. In terms of rewards, both nonsupervisory employees and supervisors are generally satisfied with the pay they receive but not with the recognition and rewards granted to them. And while they support the concept of performance-based pay, they are unsure about how well it can be implemented in the Federal sector.

In terms of retention, nearly a quarter of survey participants indicated that they were likely to leave their agency in the next year. Employees who said they were planning to leave were primarily concerned with the opportunity to earn more money and increased opportunities for career advancement. While those statements of intent to leave may not actually translate into a quarter of the workforce leaving, they are something that should concern agencies.

## Recommendations

While the results of the Merit Principles Survey 2005 indicate that the Federal Government does a fairly good job of managing its workforce in adherence to the merit system principles, there are several areas in which agencies can improve. The

Federal Government's strengths revolve around the commitment and dedication of its workforce as well as the trust the workforce generally has in front-line supervisors. These two attributes can serve as the foundation for further improvements. To this end, the Board recommends the following actions:

1. Because the data indicate that difficulties in recruiting highly qualified applicants is a barrier to preparing the workforce to achieve its mission, agencies need to identify why they may not be reaching a high-quality applicant pool through their recruitment and selection procedures. Key areas to examine include:
  - ❑ The types of recruitment strategies being used and how well they attract applicants with the right skill sets;
  - ❑ The length and complexity of the agency hiring process and how that affects applicant turnover; and
  - ❑ The effectiveness of the assessment instruments being used to identify the candidates who are best qualified.<sup>24</sup>
2. Employees would like more training to prepare them to perform their job duties more effectively. Because there are often barriers to employee training, such as absence of sufficient funding, supervisors and employees should work together to: identify training needs that will support the organization's mission; set employee expectations regarding the availability of training opportunities; and prioritize the organization's training activities. One way to accomplish these goals is to institute career development plans, as appropriate, throughout the organization. Often, these types of plans aid communication between employees and supervisors about what training is needed and with what priority.
3. A primary finding throughout this report is the importance of trust between employees and their first-line supervisors. Therefore, a key recommendation is for agencies, supervisors, and their employees to work together to continue strengthening the trust and working relationship between supervisors and their employees. This strengthened relationship is the key to reducing perceptions of unfair treatment in the workplace and the repercussions of workplace conflict. Ensuring that the lines of communication are not just open but used and that employees are comfortable talking with supervisors is the key to building trust and should strengthen supervisors' ability to resolve conflicts by working with their employees.
4. Although there has been significant progress in achieving fair and equitable treatment of employees in the Federal workplace, agencies must remain vigilant. They must continue to educate their managers and nonsupervisory employees in proper workplace behavior, and to monitor adherence to merit system principles and prevention of prohibited personnel practices in support of ongoing monitoring by oversight authorities.

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<sup>24</sup> For more information on how to improve agency hiring processes, see U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Reforming Federal Hiring: Beyond Faster and Cheaper*, Washington, D.C., July 2006.

## Conclusions

5. Agencies must recognize the motivational importance of nonpay factors such as formal awards and recognition from supervisors and peers and create a culture in which employees trust that their performance will be accurately rated and that they will be treated fairly. If agencies are to effectively use recognition and awards to reward and motivate employees, they need to ensure that resources are available to make the recognition valuable to the employee and that supervisors have the authority to make full use of those resources. Our data indicate that in too many agencies neither is the case.
6. Agencies should implement workforce planning strategies that use recruitment, retention efforts, and training to build and sustain a high-quality workforce. Governmentwide projections indicate that over the next 10 years, agencies could be facing high turnover rates because of retirements. While we cannot be certain that these projections will come to fruition, it is safe to say that the Government will be facing higher turnover rates and should be prepared for them. Recruitment strategies help to hire people with skills the agency workforce does not possess and for which it is difficult to train. Retention strategies assist in keeping valuable skills in the agency and can also provide a good opportunity to gain the time for knowledge transfer from those nearing retirement to the next generation workforce. Training is also an important component of the workforce planning strategy for skills that are readily trainable.

By instituting these recommendations, and other actions that fit their particular needs, agencies should improve their ability to accomplish their individual missions on behalf of the Government and the Nation by committing to success, preparing for success, overcoming obstacles to success, and preserving success.

# Appendix A: The Merit Principles Survey 2005



U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD  
1615 M Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20419-0001

May 2005

Dear Federal Coworker:

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 2005. The Federal Government is facing many workforce challenges in the years ahead, and the results of this survey will help the President, Congress, and other Federal decision-makers develop policy that supports both merit and mission accomplishment. 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 effort is an important part of MSPB's responsibility to study the efficiency and effectiveness of the Federal civil service. We have been periodically conducting this survey for over 20 years. Using this year's survey results, we will be able to report how well the Federal workforce is being managed.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and all of your responses will be confidential. The survey should take you about 30 minutes to complete via the internet and may be completed at your work site or at home using the survey website and unique password emailed to you by Caliber Associates, our survey support contractor. Additional information about this effort is available by clicking the "STUDIES" icon on MSPB's website ([www.mspb.gov](http://www.mspb.gov)).

If you have any other questions about this survey, please contact us on our survey hotline at (202) 653-6772, Ext. 1337 or via e-mail at [meritsurvey2005@caliber.com](mailto:meritsurvey2005@caliber.com). Thank you in advance for contributing to this important effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steve Nelson".

Steve Nelson  
Director, Policy and Evaluation



**AGENCY**

Your agency is the governmental component where you work. If you work for an "independent agency," such as the Office of Personnel Management or the Environmental Protection Agency, this organization is your agency. If you work in one of the large cabinet-level departments, such as the Department of the Treasury, Department of Justice, or the Department of Defense, then "your agency" will be a major component of that department.

**1. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about your agency:**

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. I understand my agency's mission . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. My agency's mission is important to me . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. I understand how I contribute to my agency's mission . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. The workforce has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. My agency produces high quality products and services . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. During the last two years, my agency's organizational structure has been stable . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- h. My agency responds constructively to workplace conflicts . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- i. My agency is successful in accomplishing its mission . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- j. I would recommend my agency as a place to work . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- k. I would recommend the Government as a place to work . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**JOB**

**2. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about your job and work setting:**

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. I am treated with respect at work . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. I am able to openly express concerns at work . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. My opinions count at work . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. I know what is expected of me on the job . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. I receive the training I need to perform my job . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. I need more training to perform my job effectively . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. My job makes good use of my skills and abilities . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- h. Creativity and innovation are rewarded . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- i. There are private sector jobs which require the same skills and abilities as my job . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- j. I have the resources to do my job well . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- k. The work I do is meaningful to me . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- l. My job is secure . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- m. In general, I am satisfied with my job . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**3. Do you provide technical guidance to or oversee the technical work of contractors?**

- Yes
- No ———> (Skip to question 5)

**4. Were you formally delegated by the contracting officer to perform this role with contractors?**

- Yes
- No

**WORK UNIT**

Your work unit is the group of people you work with on a regular basis and with whom you most identify. This will usually be a group of employees working for the same immediate supervisor. A work unit is often larger than a "team" and may include one or more "teams" lead by "team leaders." If you are a supervisor, please consider your work unit to be the group of people that you directly supervise.

**5. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about your work unit:**

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. My work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. Information is shared freely in my work unit ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work unit ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists between my work unit and other work units ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. My work unit responds flexibly to changing conditions ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. My work unit produces high quality products and services ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. In my work unit, performance ratings accurately reflect job performance .... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- h. Recognition and rewards are based on performance in my work unit ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**6. How many employees are in your immediate work unit, including the supervisor and team leaders?**  
(Your immediate supervisor is usually the first person to sign your performance appraisal rating.)

(Use leading zeros. For example, if there were three employees in your work unit, you would enter '003' in the boxes and fill in the corresponding circles below.)

0	0	0
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	7	7
8	8	8
9	9	9

**7. How many employees were hired into your immediate work unit in the past year?**

0	0	0
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	7	7
8	8	8
9	9	9

**8. How many employees left your work unit in the past year?**

0	0	0
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	7	7
8	8	8
9	9	9

**9. In your opinion, how many employees in your immediate work unit, if any, are performing below what is reasonably expected from them on the job?**

0	0	0
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	7	7
8	8	8
9	9	9

**10. How many employees in your immediate work unit, if any, are performing so poorly that they deserve to be fired?**

0	0	0
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	7	7
8	8	8
9	9	9

**11. How would you rate your own performance in comparison to those in your immediate work unit?**

- Above average
- Average
- Below average

**JOB PERFORMANCE**

12. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about job performance:

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. I understand the basis for my most recent performance rating ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. The standards used to appraise my performance are appropriate ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. I participate in setting standards and goals used to evaluate my job performance ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. I understand what I must do to receive a high performance rating ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. I have sufficient opportunities (such as challenging assignments or projects) to earn a high performance rating ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. I know how my performance rating compares to others in my organization who have similar jobs ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. I am satisfied with my organization's performance appraisal system ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

13. Objective measures are used to evaluate my performance.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
  
- Don't Know/Can't Judge

14. How many rating levels are in your performance appraisal system?

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 or more
  
- Don't know

15. If your team performs well how likely is it that you will receive a cash award or pay increase?

- Very Likely
- Likely
- Neither Likely nor Unlikely
- Unlikely
- Very Unlikely
  
- Don't Know/Can't Judge

**PAY AND REWARDS**

16. How important are each of the following in motivating you to do a good job?

Very Unimportant  
Unimportant  
Neither Important nor Unimportant  
Important  
Very Important

- a. A cash award of \$100 ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. A cash award of \$1,000 ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. Desire not to let my supervisor down .. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. Desire not to let my coworkers down .. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. Recognition from my coworkers ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. Desire for a good performance rating... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. My duty as a public employee ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- h. Increased chances for promotion ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- i. Desire to help my work unit meet its goals ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- j. Personal pride or satisfaction in my work..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- k. A time off reward of 8 hours ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- l. Non-cash recognition (e.g., letter of appreciation, plaque) ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**PAY AND REWARDS** *(continued)*

17. How important should each of the following be in determining cash awards and pay increases?

Very Unimportant  
Unimportant  
Neither Important nor Unimportant  
Important  
Very Important

- a. Job-related skills and training ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. Job-related work experience ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. Length of service in the Federal Government ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. Your job performance ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. Overall performance of your work unit . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. Overall performance of your agency.... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. Salary levels in your geographical area ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- h. Salary levels in your field of work ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

18. In my opinion, basing pay on performance:

Don't Know/Can't Judge  
Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. Motivates employees to work harder . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥
- b. Would increase my pay ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥
- c. Would help my agency retain high performers ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥
- d. Encourages teamwork ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥
- e. Results in unfair treatment of employees ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥
- f. Increases employee morale ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥
- g. Makes employees more vulnerable to political coercion ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

19. I understand how my pay relates to my job performance.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

20. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about your pay and awards:

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. My organization takes steps to ensure that employees are appropriately paid and rewarded ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. If I perform well, it is likely I will receive a cash award or pay increase .. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. I am satisfied with the recognition and awards I receive for my work ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. Overall, I am satisfied with my pay ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

21. If you are not satisfied with the recognition and awards you receive for your work, to what extent do the following factors contribute to your lack of satisfaction with recognition and awards?

Don't Know/Can't Judge  
No Extent  
Minimal Extent  
Moderate Extent  
Great Extent

- a. The award or recognition was too small ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. The award or recognition was not timely ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. The award or recognition was not given effectively ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. Other employees received undeserved awards or recognition .... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. Other employees in my organization did not receive the awards or recognition they deserved ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. I did not receive an award ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**FAIRNESS**

22. In the past 2 years, to what extent do you believe you have been treated fairly regarding the following?

- |  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
|  | No Extent           |
|  | Little Extent       |
|  | Some Extent         |
|  | Considerable Extent |
|  | Very Great Extent   |
- a. Career advancement ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
  - b. Awards ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
  - c. Training ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
  - d. Performance appraisals ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
  - e. Job assignments ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
  - f. Discipline ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
  - g. Pay ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

23. In the past 2 years, have you made any formal disclosure of fraud, waste, abuse, or unlawful behavior at work?

- Yes       No

24. In the past 2 years, have you exercised any formal appeal, complaint, or grievance right?

- Yes       No

25. In the past 2 years, do you feel you have been denied a job, promotion, pay or other job benefit because of unlawful discrimination based upon:

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
|  | Don't Know/Can't Judge |
|  | No                     |
|  | Yes                    |
- a. Race/national origin ..... ① ② ③
  - b. Sex ..... ① ② ③
  - c. Age ..... ① ② ③
  - d. Disability ..... ① ② ③
  - e. Religion ..... ① ② ③
  - f. Marital status ..... ① ② ③
  - g. Political affiliation ..... ① ② ③
  - h. Sexual orientation ..... ① ② ③

26. In the past 2 years, do you feel you have been:

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
|  | Don't Know/Can't Judge |
|  | No                     |
|  | Yes                    |
- a. Discouraged from competing for a job or promotion by an agency official ..... ① ② ③
  - b. Influenced by an agency official to withdraw from competition for a Federal job or promotion in order to help another person's chances of getting that job or promotion ..... ① ② ③
  - c. Denied a job or promotion because one of the selecting or recommending officials gave an unfair advantage to another recipient ..... ① ② ③
  - d. Denied a job or promotion because it was given to a relative of a selecting or recommending official ..... ① ② ③
  - e. Denied an award based on favoritism by the nominating or approving officials ..... ① ② ③

27. In the past 2 years, do you feel you have been retaliated against or threatened with retaliation for:

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
|  | Don't Know/Can't Judge |
|  | No                     |
|  | Yes                    |
- a. Disclosing health and safety dangers, unlawful behavior, and/or fraud, waste, and abuse ..... ① ② ③
  - b. Exercising any appeal, complaint, or grievance right ..... ① ② ③
  - c. Testifying for or otherwise assisting any individual in the exercise of whistleblowing, equal opportunity, or appeal rights ..... ① ② ③
  - d. Refusing to obey an unlawful order ..... ① ② ③
  - e. Reporting unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment ..... ① ② ③
  - f. Disagreeing with management decisions ... ① ② ③

**FAIRNESS** *(continued)*

*A serious conflict is one that you felt if not addressed would result in negative workforce consequences such as low morale, low organizational productivity or performance, perceived unfairness, absenteeism, attrition, or even fear.*

28. In the past 2 years, have you experienced a serious conflict in your work unit?

- Yes
- No

29. In the past 2 years, have you experienced any repeated unwanted sexual attention or harassment on the job?

- Yes
- No

30. In the past 2 years, have you experienced any repeated unwanted non-sexual attention, humiliation, harassment, bullying, or other malicious or offensive behavior on the job?

- Yes
- No

31. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements:

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. I trust third party investigative or adjudicatory agencies (such as the OSC, EEOC, FLRA, MSPB) to respond appropriately to complaints . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. I believe that the current employment grievance system, if I had occasion to use it, would be fair . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. I believe that the current employment appeals system, if I had occasion to use it, would be fair . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. I believe my agency treats me fairly in matters related to my employment . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**YOUR SUPERVISOR**

Please answer the following questions about your supervisor and agency leadership.

32. To what extent do you think your supervisor will exercise each of the following authorities in a fair and effective manner?

Don't Know/Can't Judge  
No Extent  
Minimal Extent  
Moderate Extent  
Great Extent

- a. Rating the qualifications of applicants for jobs . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. Selecting people for vacancies or promotions based on their qualifications . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. Determining pay increases and awards . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. Setting individual employees' pay within broad pay bands . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. Taking adverse actions such as suspensions and removals . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

*Please continue on the next page.*

**YOUR SUPERVISOR** *(continued)*

**33. I trust my supervisor to:**

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. Fairly assess my performance and contributions ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. Support me in pay and award discussions with upper management . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. Listen fairly to my concerns ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. Apply discipline fairly and only when justified ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. Clearly communicate conduct expectations ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. Act with integrity..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. Refrain from favoritism ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- h. Keep me informed..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**34. I trust managers above my immediate supervisor to:**

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. Clearly communicate organizational performance expectations ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. Fairly assess my performance and contributions ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. Listen fairly to my concerns ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. Apply discipline fairly and only when justified ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. Act with integrity..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. Refrain from favoritism ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. Keep the organization informed ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**35. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about your supervisor and agency leadership:**

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. Discussions with my supervisor about my performance are worthwhile ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. My supervisor keeps me informed about how well I am doing ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. My supervisor provides constructive feedback on my job performance .... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. My supervisor provides timely feedback on my job performance .... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. My supervisor provides coaching, training opportunities, or other assistance to help me improve my skills and performance ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. I understand how my supervisor will evaluate my performance ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. My supervisor rates my performance fairly and accurately ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- h. My supervisor is held accountable for rating employee performance fairly and accurately ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- i. My supervisor deals effectively with poor performers ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- j. I am comfortable discussing workplace conflicts with my supervisor.... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- k. My supervisor responds constructively to workplace conflicts .. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- l. My supervisor has good technical skills ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- m. My supervisor has good management skills ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- n. Overall, I am satisfied with my supervisor ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- o. Overall, I am satisfied with managers above my immediate supervisor ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**TRAINING**

Please answer the following question about your training needs.

36. Briefly describe, in one or two sentences, the most important skill or ability you could learn to improve your performance in your current job. Please describe this skill or ability well enough that a training specialist who does not know your job could understand what you need to learn.

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37. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about developing this skill or ability:

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. I would be overcoming a deficiency or closing a gap in my skill set ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. I would be extending or fine-tuning my skills in an area of personal strength ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. I would be acquiring a new skill I have not attempted to learn before ... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. I would be “trying again” to learn something I was not fully successful in learning in the past ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. I would be updating my proficiency in an area that has changed since I learned it last ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. This skill or ability is described on my formal career development plan .. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

38. How effective do you think each of the following strategies would be for developing the particular skill or ability you have targeted?

Very Ineffective  
Somewhat Ineffective  
Somewhat Effective  
Very Effective

- a. Developmental assignments or other on-the-job training ..... ① ② ③ ④
- b. Face-to-face classroom training classes or educational coursework ..... ① ② ③ ④
- c. Mentoring or coaching from a more experienced co-worker ..... ① ② ③ ④
- d. Online classroom learning with an instructor and other class members ..... ① ② ③ ④
- e. Self-directed study using books, web sites, CDs, DVDs, videos, etc. .... ① ② ③ ④

39. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about improving this skill or ability:

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. My agency should support this improvement by paying for training or education ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. My agency should support this improvement through special assignments, mentoring, or other on-the-job experiences ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. I should personally support this improvement by paying for training or education ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. I should personally support this improvement by finding appropriate opportunities or experiences outside of the workplace ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. My job should be redesigned using automation, reference materials, or other aids so that this ability is less necessary ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**CAREER PLANS**

Please answer the following questions about your career plans.

40. How likely is it that you will leave your agency in the next 12 months?

- Very Likely
- Somewhat Likely
- Neither Likely nor Unlikely
- Somewhat Unlikely
- Very Unlikely
  
- Don't Know/Can't Judge

41. If you plan to leave your present job, would you be:

- Retiring from Federal service?
- Resigning from Federal service?
- Moving to another job within the Federal Government?
  
- Not sure.

42. Are you or will you become eligible to retire within the next 12 months?

- Yes
- No

43. If you left your agency in the near future, how important would each of the following have been in your decision?

Very Unimportant  
Unimportant  
Neither Important nor Unimportant  
Important  
Very Important

- a. Desire to make more of a difference . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. Problems with supervisor . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- c. Problems with coworkers . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- d. Unfair treatment or harassment . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- e. Opportunity to make better use of your skills and abilities . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- f. Increased opportunities for advancement . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- g. Opportunity to earn more money . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- h. Improved opportunities for training . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- i. Opportunity for recognition for performance . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Very Unimportant  
Unimportant  
Neither Important nor Unimportant  
Important  
Very Important

- j. Opportunity to change to a different type of work . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- k. Opportunity for greater organizational stability . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- l. Increased job security . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- m. Opportunity to move to another geographical location . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**SUPERVISORY STATUS**

44. What is your supervisory status?

- Non-Supervisor** (You do not supervise other employees) ———→ (Skip to question 55)
- Team Leader** (You do not have official supervisory responsibilities or conduct performance appraisals, but you do provide employees with day-to-day guidance in work projects) → (Skip to question 55)
- Supervisor** (You are responsible for employee performance appraisals and 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** (SES or equivalent)

If you selected supervisor, manager, or executive, please continue with question 45.

**MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE**

Please answer the following questions about your experiences as a supervisor, manager, or executive. If you are a non-supervisor or a team leader, please skip to question 55.

45. How many years have you been a supervisor?

0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9

46. About how many hires total have you personally made in the past 2 years?

0	0	0	0	0
1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9

**MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE** *(continued)*

47. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements:

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

- a. My organization has sufficient funds to appropriately reward high performance *(Your organization refers to the next higher level unit to which your work unit belongs. This is usually the level between your work unit and your agency.)* . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
- b. I have enough authority to reward high performance through pay increases or awards . . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

48. During the past year, did you rate any employee higher or lower than you believe the employee deserved?

- Yes —→ *(Go on to the next question)*
- No —→ *(Skip to question 50)*

49. Why did the employee(s) receive that rating? *(Mark all that apply.)*

- Flawed performance standards or measures
- Lack of information about an employee's performance
- Lack of time
- Lack of training on rating employee performance
- Lack of authority
- Lack of support from higher-level management
- A history of inflated performance ratings
- A forced distribution or quota for performance ratings
- Documentation requirements
- The possibility of a grievance or complaint
- The employee(s) filed a grievance or complaint

Please answer this set of questions about your experiences dealing with workplace conflicts.

50. My employees are comfortable discussing workplace conflicts with me.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

51. In the past two years as a supervisor, have you encountered serious conflicts in your work unit?

- Yes —→ *(Go on to the next question)*
- No —→ *(Skip to question 55)*

52. The conflicts concerned: *(Mark all that apply.)*

- Work assignment
- Opportunities for training or development
- Opportunities for promotion
- Performance appraisal
- Awards
- Salary/pay
- Employee conduct
- Employee performance
- Relationship between employees
- Relationship between manager(s) and employee(s)
- Other

53. For the most memorable conflict within the past two years, what attempts did you make internally to resolve the conflict?

- (Mark all that apply.)*
- Gave the conflict time to resolve itself
  - Informal discussion
  - General meeting (e.g., staff meeting or "all hands" meeting)
  - Provided information to employees
  - Formal meeting(s) with employee(s) or employee representative(s)
  - Officially documented the source of the conflict and/or took (or attempted to take) formal disciplinary actions
  - Internal process using a neutral third party moderator (such as alternative dispute resolution, mediation, or conciliation)
  - Formal agency process (EEO complaint, grievance, etc.)

54. What best describes the outcome of the above conflict?

- Conflict resolved itself without intervention
- Conflict was resolved internally to the satisfaction of many or most involved
- Conflict was resolved internally to the satisfaction of a minority of those involved
- Conflict was referred to an external third party adjudicator for resolution (such as EEOC, MSPB, FLRA, OSC)
- Conflict was not resolved but only few or minor negative consequences have occurred
- Conflict was not resolved and negative consequences have occurred affecting the overall performance of the unit

**EMPLOYMENT FACTS**

**ALL EMPLOYEES:**

**Please tell us a few facts about yourself. (This information will only be used to create statistical summaries.)**

**55. Where do you work?**

- Agriculture - Food Safety and Inspection Service
- Agriculture - Forest Service
- Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Agriculture - Other
  
- Air Force
  
- Army - US Army Corps of Engineers
- Army - Other
  
- Commerce - Census
- Commerce - National Institute of Standards and Technology
- Commerce - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Commerce - Patent and Trademark Office
- Commerce - Other
  
- Defense - Defense Contract Management Agency
- Defense - Defense Finance and Accounting Service
- Defense - Defense Logistics Agency
- Defense - Other
  
- Education
  
- Energy
  
- Environmental Protection Agency
  
- Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
  
- General Services Administration - Public Buildings Service
- General Services Administration - Other
  
- Health and Human Services - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Health and Human Services - Indian Health Service
- Health and Human Services - National Institutes of Health
- Health and Human Services - Other

**55. (continued)**

- Homeland Security - Bureau of Customs and Border Protection
- Homeland Security - Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- Homeland Security - Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Homeland Security - Transportation Security Administration
- Homeland Security - U.S. Coast Guard
- Homeland Security - U.S. Secret Service
- Homeland Security - Other
  
- Housing and Urban Development
  
- Interior - Bureau of Land Management
- Interior - Indian Affairs
- Interior - National Park Service
- Interior - Other
  
- Justice - Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives
- Justice - Bureau of Prisons/Federal Prison System
- Justice - Drug Enforcement Administration
- Justice - Executive Office of the U.S. Attorney
- Justice - Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Justice - Other
  
- Labor
  
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration
  
- Navy - U.S. Marine Corps
- Navy - Other
  
- Office of Personnel Management
  
- Social Security Administration
  
- State Department
  
- Transportation - Federal Aviation Administration
- Transportation - Other
  
- Treasury - Internal Revenue Service
- Treasury - Office of the Comptroller of Currency
- Treasury - Other
  
- Veterans Affairs - Veterans Benefits Administration
- Veterans Affairs - Veterans Health Administration
- Veterans Affairs - Other

**56. Do you work at your agency's headquarters office (typically in Washington, DC) or in a field location?**

- Headquarters
- Field

**EMPLOYMENT FACTS** *(continued)*

57. How many years have you been a Federal civil service employee? *(Please round to the nearest year.)*

0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9

58. How many years have you been with your current Federal agency? *(Please round to the nearest year.)*

0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9

59. How many years of work experience did you have before working for the Federal Government? *(Please round to the nearest year.)*

0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

60. What is your pay plan?

- Federal Wage System (e.g., WG, WS, WL)
- GS - General Schedule
- ES - Senior Executive Service
- AD - Administratively Determined
- AT - Air Traffic Controller
- FG - FAA Similar to General Schedule
- FV - FAA Core Compensation Plan
- GG - Grades Similar to General Schedule
- ND - Navy Demonstration Scientific & Engineering
- NH - DoD Acquisition Demonstration Professional
- SV - Transportation Security Administration
- VM - Veterans Medical & Dental
- Veterans Affairs Nursing

61. What is your approximate annual salary? *(Please round to the nearest \$1,000.)*

\$ 

0	0	0
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	7	7
8	8	8
9	9	9

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62. Are you a dues-paying member of a union?

- Yes
- No, but my position is covered by a bargaining agreement
- No. I am not sure if my position is covered by a bargaining agreement
- No. My position is either not covered by a bargaining agreement or I am otherwise not eligible to be a member of a union
- Don't Know/Can't Judge

**DEMOGRAPHICS** *(continued)*

63. Are you:

- Male
- Female

64. What is your age?

0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9

65. What is your current education level?

- High school, GED, or equivalent
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate or equivalent
- None of the above

66. What race or ethnic category do you consider yourself to be? *(Mark all that apply.)*

- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black/African American
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- White
- Hispanic or Latino

**OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

67. Please describe the most important change your agency could make to more effectively accomplish its mission.

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68. Please describe one improvement or change to your work situation your agency or supervisor could make that would improve your personal job performance.

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69. If you are a supervisor, what is the primary obstacle you face in hiring employees?

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For help or other questions, please contact [meritsurvey2005@caliber.com](mailto:meritsurvey2005@caliber.com)

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY.**

**PLEASE DO NOT WRITE  
ON THIS PAGE.**

# Appendix B: Participating Agencies

For each department and independent agency, MSPB selected a representative, agency-wide random sample of nonsupervisory employees and all levels of supervisors. In many cases, we also selected representative samples from the agencies' major components. The departments and independent agencies that participated in the survey are listed below:

## Department/Agency

Department of Agriculture

Department of Commerce

Department of Defense

Air Force

Army

Navy

Department of Education

Department of Energy

Environmental Protection Agency

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

General Services Administration

Department of Homeland Security

Department of Health and Human Services

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Department of Justice

Department of Labor

Department of Interior

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Office of Personnel Management

Social Security Administration

Department of State

Department of Transportation

Department of Treasury

Department of Veterans Affairs



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