

## Survey on the Future of Government Service Executive Summary July 16, 2015

The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Vanderbilt University, in cooperation with Princeton University and the Volcker Alliance, has conducted the *Survey on the Future of Government Service* to find out what United States federal executives think about pressing issues facing the federal workforce.

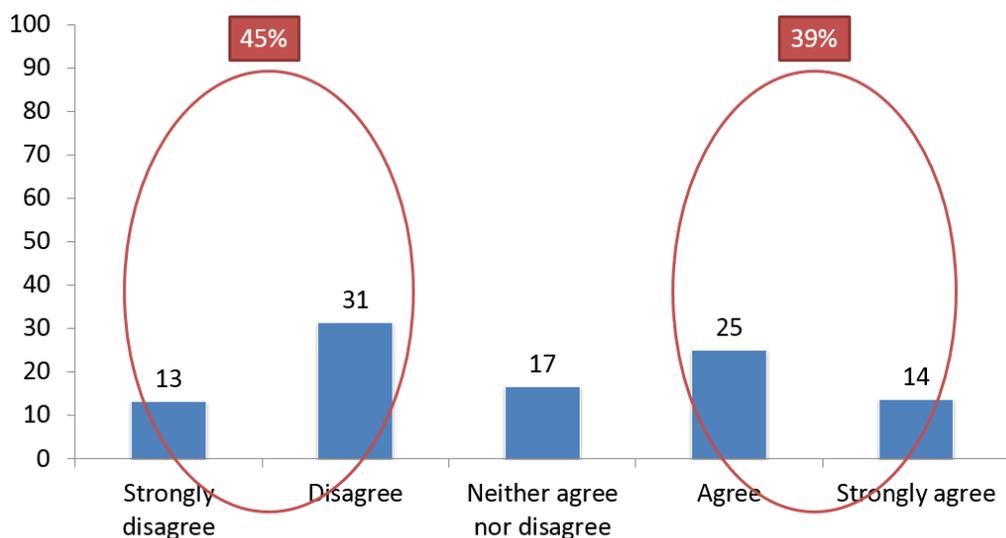
We obtained on-line and paper survey responses of 3,551 federal executives. The survey was administered by the Princeton Survey Research Center from August 14, 2014 to December 15, 2014. The margin of error for the full sample is +/- 1.8 percentage points. The survey has a split sample design. Questions only asked of half the sample have a margin of error of +/- 2.6 percentage points.

### Key highlights

The survey includes 29 questions about the state of the public service. Overall, the federal workforce is capable, but under stress. Federal executives report difficulty recruiting and retaining the best employees. Furthermore, merit is often not sufficiently incorporated into promotions and, especially, dismissals. Survey results also reveal substantial variation among agencies; some agencies have a high capacity workforce while others struggle to successfully accomplish their core tasks.

- A significant number of executives worry about the capacity of their workforce and how it impacts the ability of their agency to fulfill its core mission.

### An inadequately skilled workforce is a significant obstacle to [my agency] fulfilling its core mission

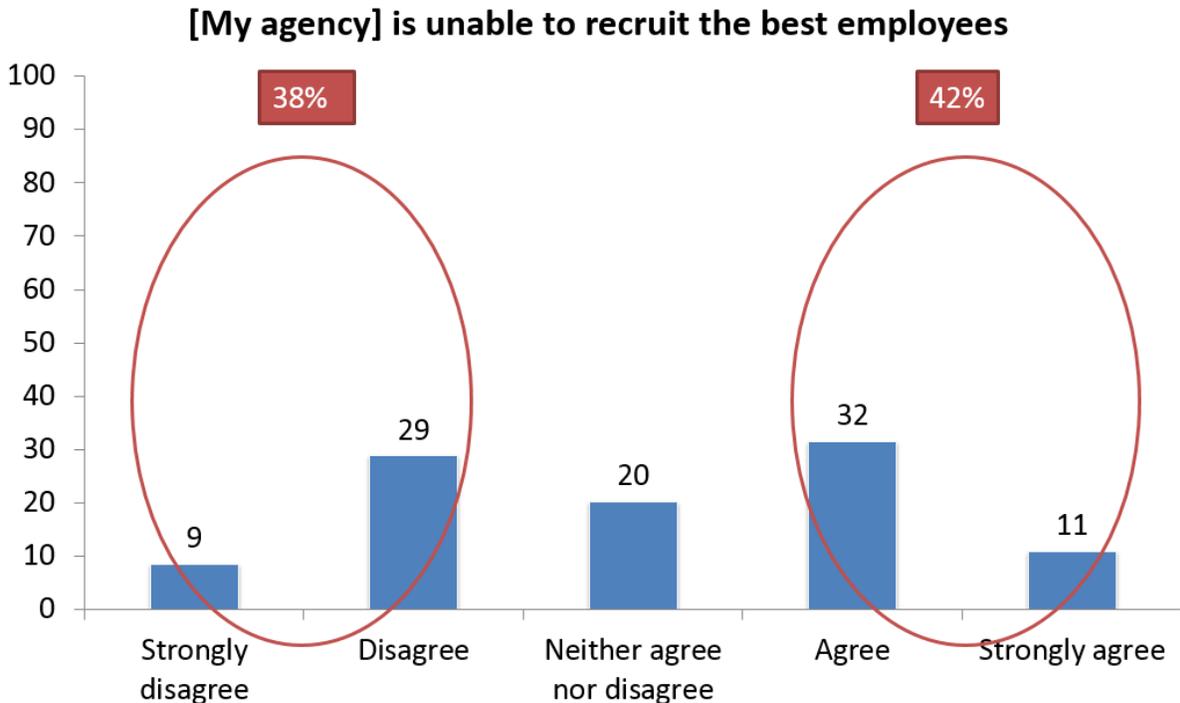


Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,675; MoE: +/-2.6%

- A slim majority reports that the skills of their workforce have improved during their time in the agency but this varies significantly by agency.
- While concerned about the skill of the workforce, 81% report confidence in their agency's ability to successfully fulfill its core mission.

### Recruitment

- 42% of federal executives report that they are unable to recruit the best employees.

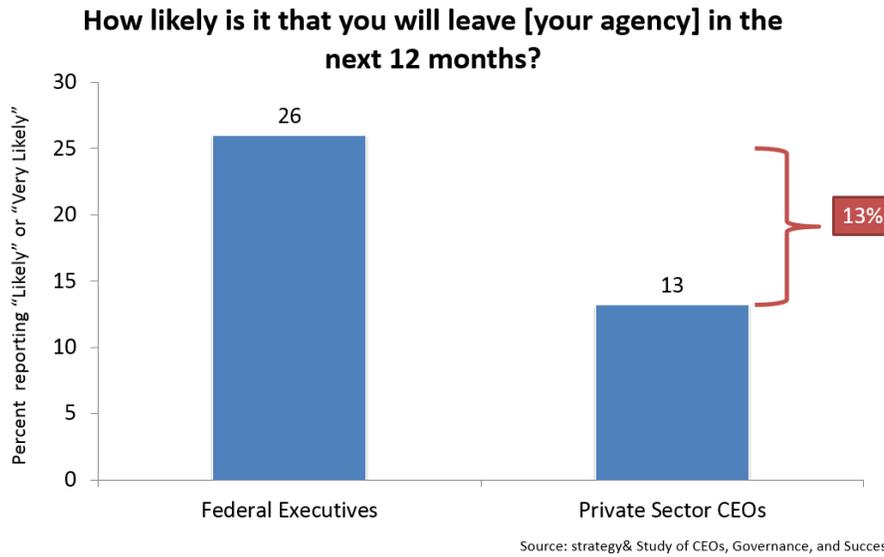


Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,682; MoE: +/-2.6%

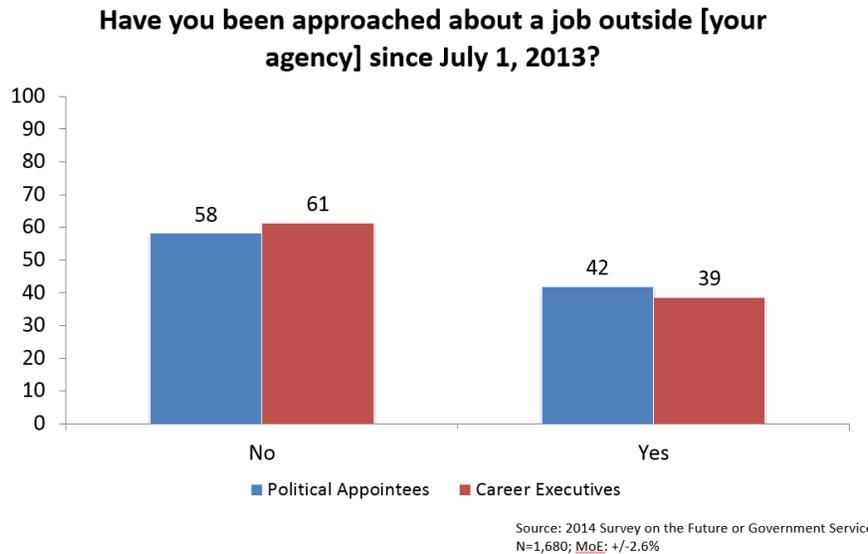
- The problem does not appear to be lack of a qualified applicant pool. Rather, executives cite lack of resources, political pressure to keep the growth of the workforce low, lack of a proactive recruiting strategy, rigid civil service rules, and low salaries.
- Only 55% of eligible respondents indicated a desire to join the Senior Executive Service or become a Senior Professional.

**Retention**

- 24% of career executives and 36% of executives that are political appointees expressed an intent to leave their agency within one year. This is compared to a departure rate of 9.8% - 13.2% for private sector CEOs (Source: strategy& [formerly Booz & Company] study of CEOs, Governance, and Success).



- Fewer than half of federal executives report that their agency is able to retain its best employees.
- Close to 40% of executives have been approached about a job outside their agency in the last year. The biggest competitors are other federal agencies, contractors, and other private sector firms.

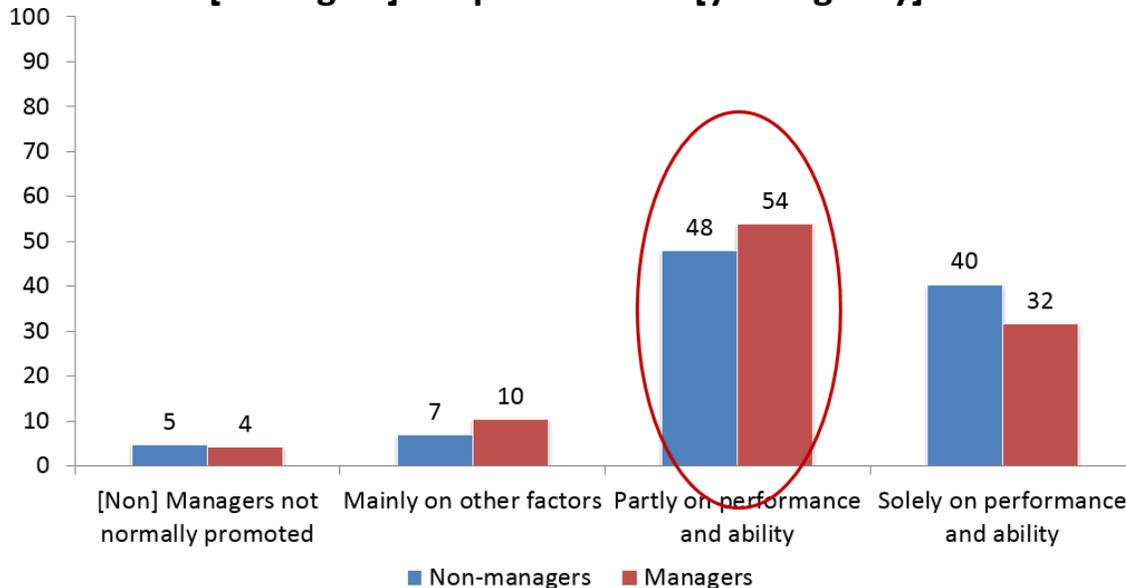


- Executives cite lack of career growth opportunities and low wages as problems in retention.
- The agencies that cannot recruit the best also cannot retain the best.

### Promotion

- The most common view among executives is that promotions of managers and non-managers is based partly on performance and ability and partly on other factors such as tenure and personal connections but this varies significantly across agencies.

### What is the primary way that non-managers [managers] are promoted at [your agency]?

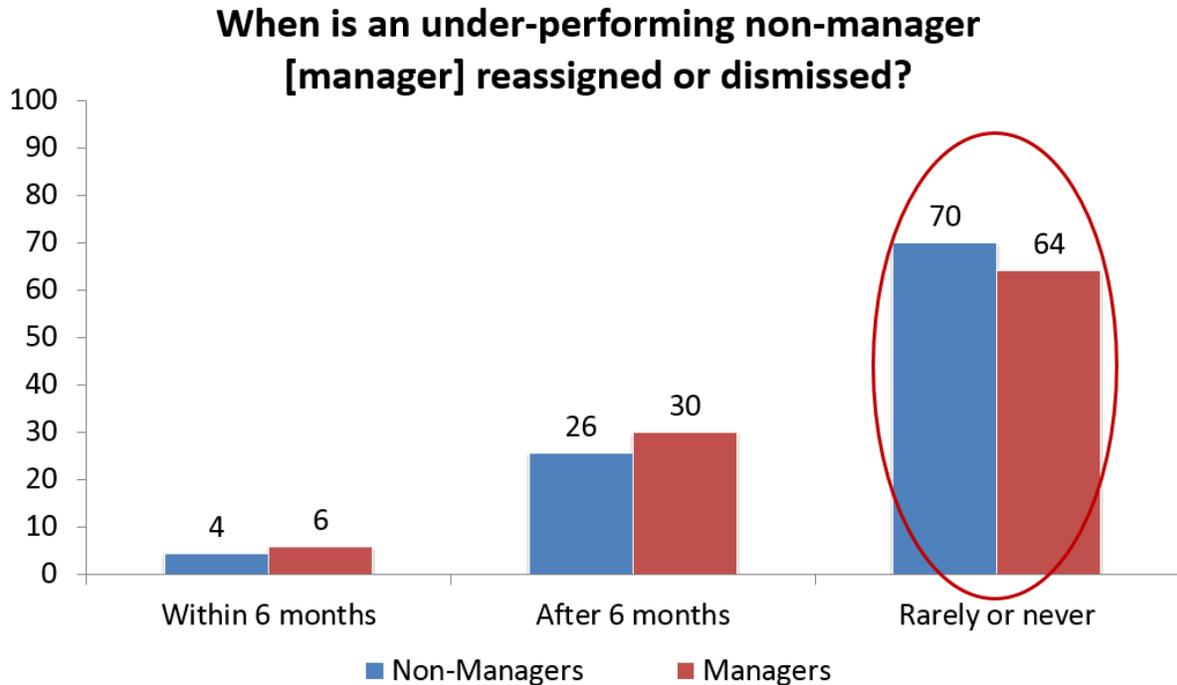


Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,656; MoE: +/-2.6%

- Executives that are political appointees report significantly less training and familiarity with key statutes related to managing civil service employees.
- Executives with more training and familiarity with key statutes related to managing the career civil service are more likely to report that promotions are made solely on the basis of performance and ability.

### Dismissal

- Most federal executives report that under-performing managers and non-managers are “rarely or never” reassigned or dismissed.



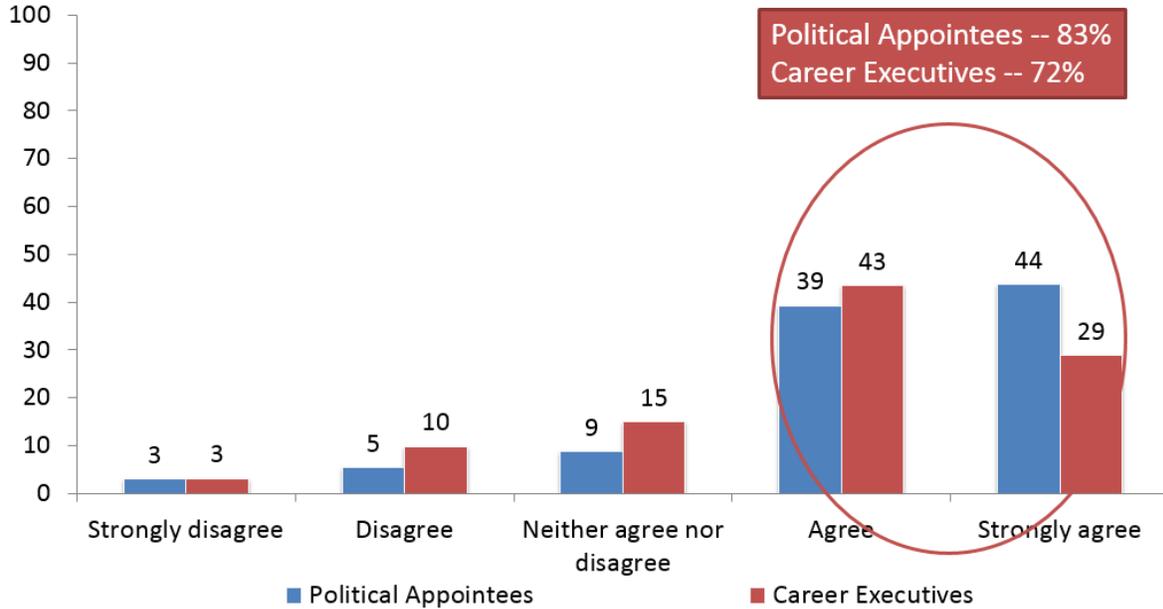
Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,626; MoE: +/-2.6%

- Private sector manufacturing executives asked the same question typically report that under-performers are removed within 6 months or after 6 months (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Management and Organizational Practices Survey, 2010).

*Public service*

- Most federal executives would still recommend that a young person work in public service as a career, although career executives are less likely to recommend it than political executives.

**I recommend that a young person work in public service today**



Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service  
N=1,683; MoE: +/-2.6%

- Executives that see performance and ability determining promotions and dismissals are more likely to recommend public service as a career.