2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service

August 2014 - December 2014
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3,551 federal executives in the United States

MoE: +/- 1.8 percentage points

Note: Reported samples sizes were updated to give the weighted sample size on 02/14/2017. A sample weight could not be constructed for four respondents. Therefore, the weighted sample size is one to four respondents fewer than the unweighted sample size depending on whether the question was asked of the full sample or a random subset. Reported percentages were based on the weighted sample and, therefore, unaffected. See the Topline Results and SFGS Methodology documents for additional explanation.
Overview

• Why this survey?
• Survey details
• Workforce skills
  – Recruitment
  – Retention
  – Promotion
  – Dismissal
• Recommendations
Importance of the Survey

• *Biased perception*: Visible failures driving perceptions of the public service

• *Big picture*: Civil service reform efforts should take a broad look at health of system with hard data

• *Quality*: Republicans and Democrats disagree about what government should do but not that it should do it well

Headlines We Should Read but Do Not

- Thousands of planes land today without incident
- National parks clean and beautiful once again today
- Millions of pieces of mail delivered on time
- Macroeconomic forecasts on target again
Importance of the Survey

- **Biased perception**: Visible failures driving perceptions of the public service

- **Big picture**: Civil service reform efforts should take a broad look at health of system with hard data

- **Quality**: Republicans and Democrats disagree about what government should do but not that it should do it well

Source: Diulio 2014
Survey Details

- Target population: U.S. Federal executives across executive establishment

- Sponsors: Vanderbilt and Princeton Universities with the help of the Volcker Alliance and Princeton Survey Research Center

- Response rate of 24% (3,551 of 14,698)
  - Margin of error for full sample is +/- 1.8%

Constructed sample using the Federal Yellow Book, published by Leadership Directories, Inc.
Key Findings

The federal personnel system is under stress

• 39% of federal executives report that an inadequately skilled workforce is a significant obstacle to their agency fulfilling its core mission

Some agencies are doing well and others are really struggling

• In certain agencies many executives report inadequate workforce skills to be a problem (e.g., 66%); in others many do not (e.g., 91%)

Recruitment

• 42% of federal executives report they cannot recruit the best employees
• Only 55% of eligible respondents want to join the SES or become a Senior Professional

Retention

• 24% of career executives report they are “likely” or “very likely” to leave their agency within one year
• 33% of executives report they cannot retain the best employees

Promotion

• 40% of executives report that performance and ability are the only factor in promotions of non-managers

Dismissal

• 70% of executives report that under-performing non-managers are “rarely or never” reassigned or dismissed
An inadequately skilled workforce is a significant obstacle to [my agency] fulfilling its core mission.

N=1,674; MoE: +/-2.6%
Does [your agency] have the skills necessary to implement effectively the core tasks given it by Congress and the president?

68%

N=2,451; MoE: +/-2.1%
Does your agency have the skills necessary to implement effectively the core tasks given it by Congress and the president? [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

Example 1

- None: 6
- Few: 24
- Some: 29
- Most: 23
- Almost all: 18
- All: 41%

Example 2

- None: 1
- Few: 27
- Some: 37
- Most: 35
- Almost all: 71%

N=2,451; MoE: +/-2.1%
Have the skills of [your agency] worsened, improved, or stayed about the same during your time in the agency?

- Much worse: 2%
- Worse: 17%
- About the same: 29%
- Better: 33%
- Much Better: 17%

N=2,450; MoE: +/-2.1%
Have the skills of [your agency] worsened, improved, or stayed about the same during your time in the agency? [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

**Example 1**

- Much worse: 2%
- Worse: 25%
- About the same: 34%
- Better: 26%
- Much better: 9%

35%

**Example 2**

- Much worse: 1%
- Worse: 13%
- About the same: 27%
- Better: 38%
- Much better: 14%

52%

N=2,450; MoE: +/-2.1%
I am confident in my agency's ability to successfully fulfill its core mission

N=1,682; MoE: +/-2.6%
Why the different levels of workforce skills?

Recruitment

Retention

Workforce Skills

Promotion

Dismissal
To what extent do the following factors contribute to the difficulty [your agency] has in maintaining a skilled workforce?

- Lack of qualified applicant pool: 35%
- Aging workforce with high employee retirement rate: 46%
- Political pressure to keep growth of workforce low: 56%
- Inadequate career growth opportunities: 57%
- Lack of proactive recruiting strategy: 57%
- Cannot compete with salaries: 53%
- Rigid civil service rules: 56%
- Lack resources: 59%

Source: 2014 Survey on the Future of Government Service N=639-642; MoE: +/-4.2%; Updated 02/14/2017 to correct paper survey branching violations.
Recruitment
[My agency] is unable to recruit the best employees

- Strongly disagree: 9%
- Disagree: 29%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 20%
- Agree: 32%
- Strongly agree: 11%

N=1,681; MoE: +/-2.6%
Recruitment Example

“Here in the [omitted], we have a vast pool of entry-level (and more advanced) talent, but the federal government’s arcane procedures make it almost impossible to reach these wonderful candidates. An example of this is the most user-unfriendly place on the planet to look for and the only way to apply for a GS-level job in our agency: the USAjobs website. It’s a nightmare, everyone finds it difficult to use, and even those familiar with job openings cannot readily refer someone to the right place to apply.”
Recruitment Example

“We recently posted an opening on USAJobs for several entry-level [omitted] openings. Within a few days, over 1,000 applicants survived the USAJobs application process, but here at [omitted], we received a list of 8 applicants from that process, reflecting veterans preference. We interviewed all 8, were keen to hire 4 of the 8, but are precluded from reaching any of the remaining 992 applicants unless we make offers to all 8!”
I am interested in becoming a member of the Senior Executive Service or a Senior Professional [eligible career executives only]

N=623; MoE: +/-3.7%
Retention
How likely is it that you will leave [your agency] in the next 12 months?

Political appointees -- 36% likely or very likely
Career executives -- 24% likely or very likely

N=3,211; MoE: +/-1.8%
How likely is it that you will leave [your agency] in the next 12 months?

Percent reporting “Likely” or “Very Likely”

Federal Executives: 26%
Private Sector CEOs: 13%

Source: strategy& Study of CEOs, Governance, and Success
[My agency] is able to retain its best employees

- **Strongly disagree**: 5%
- **Disagree**: 28%
- **Neither agree nor disagree**: 22%
- **Agree**: 38%
- **Strongly agree**: 7%

N=1,681; MoE: +/-2.6%
[My agency] is able to retain its best employees
[Two agencies as illustrative examples]

**Example 1**

- Strongly disagree: 9
- Disagree: 62
- Neither agree nor disagree: 30
- Agree: 30
- Strongly agree: 9

**Example 2**

- Strongly disagree: 4
- Disagree: 20
- Neither agree nor disagree: 10
- Agree: 66
- Strongly agree: 9


N=1,681; MoE: +/-2.6%
Are you now or will you become eligible to retire in the next 12 months? [Career executives only]

N=2,819; MoE: +/-2.0%
Have you been approached about a job outside [your agency] since July 1, 2013?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Appointees</th>
<th>Career Executives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=1,677; MoE: +/-2.6%
Have you been approached about a job outside [your agency] since July 1, 2013? If so, by what type of organization? [check all that apply]

- Federal agencies other than [your agency]: Political Appointees 40%, Career Executives 49%
- Other private business: Political Appointees 46%, Career Executives 44%
- Government contractor: Political Appointees 19%, Career Executives 28%
- Not-for-profits: Political Appointees 34%, Career Executives 20%
- Lobbying firms and organizations: Political Appointees 21%, Career Executives 11%
- State or local agency: Political Appointees 16%, Career Executives 11%
- Other: Political Appointees 16%, Career Executives 12%

N=653; MoE: +/-4.3%
Ability to Recruit and Retain the Best by Agency

Two possible explanations for the strong correlation between difficulty recruiting and retaining the best:

1. Market conditions

2. Management problems

[My agency] is able to retain its best employees

N=1,678; MoE: +/-2.6%
Promotion
What is the primary way that non-managers [managers] are promoted at [your agency]?

- [Non] Managers not normally promoted
- Mainly on other factors
- Partly on performance and ability
- Solely on performance and ability

N=1,655-1,656; MoE: +/-2.6%
What is the primary way that non-managers [managers] are promoted at [your agency]? [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

**Example 1**
- [Non] Managers not normally promoted: 4, 11
- Mainly on other factors: 18, 20
- Partly on performance and ability: 70, 61
- Solely on performance and ability: 8, 8

**Example 2**
- [Non] Managers not normally promoted: 2, 2
- Mainly on other factors: 45, 42
- Partly on performance and ability: 53, 56
- Solely on performance and ability: 56, 53

N=1,655-1,656; MoE: +/-2.6%
What is the primary way that non-managers are promoted at [your agency]?

- [Non] Managers not normally promoted: 5 (Public) / 10 (Private)
- Mainly on other factors: 7 (Public) / 20 (Private)
- Partly on performance and ability: 48 (Public) / 14 (Private)
- Solely on performance and ability: 40 (Public) / 74 (Private)

Dismissal
When is an under-performing non-manager [manager] reassigned or dismissed?

- **Within 6 months**
  - Non-Managers: 4
  - Managers: 6

- **After 6 months**
  - Non-Managers: 26
  - Managers: 30

- **Rarely or never**
  - Non-Managers: 70
  - Managers: 64

N=1,625-1,631; MoE: +/-2.6%
When is an under-performing non-manager [manager] reassigned or dismissed? [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

**Example 1**

- **Non-managers**
  - Within 6 months: 4
  - After 6 months: 15
  - Rarely or never: 85
- **Managers**
  - Within 6 months: 31
  - After 6 months: 65

**Example 2**

- **Non-managers**
  - Within 6 months: 5
  - After 6 months: 34
  - Rarely or never: 41
- **Managers**
  - Within 6 months: 8
  - After 6 months: 61
  - Rarely or never: 51

N=1,625-1,631; MoE: +/-2.6%
When is an under-performing non-manager reassigned or dismissed?

- **Within 6 months**
  - Public Sector Executives: 4%
  - Private Sector Executives: 52%

- **After 6 months**
  - Public Sector Executives: 26%
  - Private Sector Executives: 27%

- **Rarely or never**
  - Public Sector Executives: 70%
  - Private Sector Executives: 21%

Source: 2010 Management and Organizational Practices Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013: N=37,177
I have a good understanding of key statutes related to managing the career civil service (e.g., the Merit System Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices)

N=1,666; MoE: +/-2.6%
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N=1,666; MoE: +/-2.6%
I have received sufficient training and guidance on how to manage (e.g., hire, promote, reward, and discipline or dismiss) employees in the career civil service.

N=1,665; MoE: +/-2.6%
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Career Executives -- 72%
Political Appointee -- 45%

N=1,665; MoE: +/-2.6%
"I have a good understanding of key statutes related to managing the career civil service..."
"I have a good understanding of key statutes related to managing the career civil service..."

N=1,627; MoE: +/-2.6%
I recommend that a young person work in public service today

Political Appointees -- 83%
Career Executives -- 72%

N=1,682; MoE: +/-2.6%
I recommend that a young person work in public service today

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

- [Non] Managers not normally promoted: 72
- Mainly on other factors: 48
- Partly on performance and ability: 74
- Solely on performance and ability: 78

N=1,654; MoE: +/-2.6%
Workforce Skills

The federal personnel system is under stress.

Some agencies are doing well and others are struggling.
Recommendations:

1. Invest in diagnosis and remedies
2. Free up managers to recruit top quality talent, reward merit, retain best employees
3. Pursue a personnel system equal to the importance of our challenges