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
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

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**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

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[Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions] [Vanderbilt University]
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

13% Strongly disagree
31% Disagree
17% Neither agree nor disagree
25% Agree
14% Strongly agree

N=1,675; MoE: +/-2.6%
Does [your agency] have the skills necessary to implement effectively the core tasks given it by Congress and the president?

- None: 0
- Few: 1
- Some: 8
- Most: 22
- Almost all: 32
- All: 35

68% of respondents believe the agency has the skills necessary to implement the core tasks given by Congress and the president.

N=2,453; 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=2,453; MoE: +/-2.1%
Have the skills of [your agency] worsened, improved, or stayed about the same during your time in the agency?

N=2,452; 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

**Example 2**
- Much worse: 1
- Worse: 13
- About the same: 27
- Better: 38
- Much better: 14

N=2,452; MoE: +/-2.1%
I am confident in my agency's ability to successfully fulfill its core mission

N=1,683; MoE: +/-2.6%
Why the different levels of workforce skills?

Recruitment  Retention

Promotion  Dismissal

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

- Lack of qualified applicant pool: 32%
- Political pressure to keep growth of workforce low: 55%
- Inadequate career growth opportunities: 54%
- Lack of proactive recruiting strategy: 54%
- Rigid civil service rules: 54%
- Cannot compete with salaries: 53%
- Aging workforce with high employee retirement rate: 45%
- Lack of resources: 59%

N=640; MoE: +/-4.2%
Recruitment
[My agency] is unable to recruit the best employees

N=1,682; 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.”
“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]

55%
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=3,212; MoE: +/-1.9%
How likely is it that you will leave [your agency] in the next 12 months?

- 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=1,682; 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: 42
- Strongly agree: 0

Example 2

- Strongly disagree: 4
- Disagree: 20
- Neither agree nor disagree: 10
- Agree: 66
- Strongly agree: 0

N=1,682; MoE: +/-2.6%
Are you now or will you become eligible to retire in the next 12 months? [Career executives only]

N=2,820; 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><strong>No</strong></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=1,680; 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]
- Other private business
- Government contractor
- Not-for-profits
- Lobbying firms and organizations
- State or local agency
- Other

N=655; MoE: +/-4.2%

Political Appointees

Career Executives
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

N=1,682; MoE: +/-2.6%
Promotion
What is the primary way that non-managers [managers] are promoted at [your agency]?

- [Non] Managers not normally promoted: 5, 4
- Mainly on other factors: 7, 10
- Partly on performance and ability: 48, 54
- Solely on performance and ability: 40, 32

N=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:
  - Managers not normally promoted: 4%
  - Mainly on other factors: 18%
  - Partly on performance and ability: 70%
  - Solely on performance and ability: 8%

- Managers:
  - Managers not normally promoted: 11%
  - Mainly on other factors: 20%
  - Partly on performance and ability: 61%
  - Solely on performance and ability: 8%

**Example 2**
- Non-managers:
  - Managers not normally promoted: 2%
  - Mainly on other factors: 45%
  - Partly on performance and ability: 42%
  - Solely on performance and ability: 53%

- Managers:
  - Managers not normally promoted: 2%
  - Mainly on other factors: 56%
  - Partly on performance and ability: 42%
  - Solely on performance and ability: 53%

N=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 Sector), 10 (Private Sector)
- Mainly on other factors: 7 (Public Sector), 20 (Private Sector)
- Partly on performance and ability: 48 (Public Sector), 14 (Private Sector)
- Solely on performance and ability: 40 (Public Sector), 74 (Private Sector)

N=1,656; MoE: +/-2.6%; 2010 Management and Organizational Practices Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013: N=37,177
Dismissal
When is an under-performing non-manager [manager] reassigned or dismissed?

N=1,626; MoE: +/-2.6%
When is an under-performing non-manager [manager] reassigned or dismissed? [Two agencies as illustrative examples]

**Example 1**

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

**Example 2**

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

N=1,626; MoE: +/-2.6%
When is an under-performing non-manager reassigned or dismissed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Public Sector Executives</th>
<th>Private Sector Executives (Manufacturing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within 6 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 6 months</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely or never</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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=1,667; MoE: +/-2.6%
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)
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=1,666; 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=1,666; MoE: +/-2.6%
Knowledge of Key Statutes Related to Managing the Career Civil Service and Merit in Non-manager Promotion

"I have a good understanding of key statutes related to managing the career civil service..."

N=1,649; MoE: +/-2.6%
Knowledge of Key Statutes Related to Managing the Career Civil Service and Speed of Non-manager Dismissals

"I have a good understanding of key statutes related to managing the career civil service..."

N=1,628; MoE: +/-2.6%
I recommend that a young person work in public service today

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

N=1,683; MoE: +/-2.6%
What is the primary way that non-managers are promoted at [your agency]?

N=1,655; 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