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# WORKING FOR AMERICA:

A FEDERAL EMPLOYEE SURVEY

A SPECIAL STUDY

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THE CHAIRMAN



U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD  
1120 Vermont Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20419

June 1990

Sirs:

In accordance with the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, I am honored to submit the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board report titled *Working for America: A Federal Employee Survey*.

This report summarizes significant findings of the Board's 1989 Merit Principles Survey. The survey obtained opinions on a variety of work-related issues from a representative cross section of 15,939 Federal employees.

I think you will find this report useful as you consider significant issues concerning the Federal civil service. It may be particularly useful for its insights into: (1) the importance of pay, retirement, and health insurance benefits to attracting and retaining a competent work force; (2) how well current Federal employees are being prepared for changes in the work place; (3) the quality of Federal job applicants; and (4) how employees view current Federal performance management systems.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel R. Levinson".

Daniel R. Levinson

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

Washington, DC

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*This report summarizes the responses to the 1989 Merit Principles Survey, a survey completed by a representative cross-section of nearly 16,000 Federal employees between July and October 1989. The survey collected facts and statements of attitude and opinion concerning a number of vital Federal personnel management issues including pay, working conditions, and the quality of supervisors, coworkers, and job applicants. It is the third such survey conducted by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) at 3-year intervals over a 9-year period and thus offers a unique basis for tracking attitudes and opinions during a time of significant change for the U.S. civil service system.*

The ability of the Federal Government to function effectively and efficiently is related in no small measure to the quality, competency, and motivation of its work force. It was with this understanding that a merit-based Federal civil service system was established over a hundred years ago. The purpose of that system is to help assure the presence of a work force capable of meeting the challenge and responsibility of public service. However, that system—and even the role of Government in our society—has evolved greatly over the intervening years.

How effective is the Federal civil service system today and how can it be improved? In addressing that question, MSPB looked to the attitudes, opinions, and experiences of Federal employees themselves. Their responses, outlined in this report, provide useful insights into such issues as the ability of the Federal Government to attract, select, motivate, and retain well qualified employees. Among some of the more important findings are the following:

## Attracting and Retaining a Quality Work Force

- Respondents generally believe that their fellow employees are good workers (only 9 percent rated them below average). However, the quality of employees who have joined their work units during the last four years is seen as somewhat lower than the quality of those who left. Moreover, for vacancies at all levels, supervisors rate the quality of applicants less favorably than did supervisors in the 1986 survey. This combination poses serious questions about the overall quality of the Federal work force in the future.

- Prohibited personnel practices which can have a negative effect on work force quality—such as improper selection or advancement for partisan political reasons—are not generally regarded as a problem in the Federal work place. A continued exception is a perception by almost a third (30 percent) of the respondents that the “buddy system” plays an intrusive role in some managers’ personnel related decisions. Discrimination is the next most frequently perceived merit system abuse (15 percent).
- Despite generally positive attitudes towards their jobs and the work they do, only about half of the respondents would recommend the Federal Government as an employer, while over one-fourth say they definitely would not. Senior Executives were the most negative, with 53 percent saying they would not recommend the Government as an employer.

## Performance Management and Productivity

- Although many employees believe their work groups are at or near capacity regarding the quantity and quality of work produced, there are others who still see some untapped capacity. As was true in 1986, about one-fourth of the respondents in 1989 believe the quantity of work performed in their work groups could be increased to a “very great” or “considerable” extent with the same people. Additionally, about 30 percent of the 1989 respondents believe the quality of the work in their unit could be im-

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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proved to a "very great" or "considerable" extent (compared to 25 percent in 1986).

- Over 72 percent of all respondents agree conceptually that a portion of their pay should be based on performance. However, only 42 percent would choose to be under a pay-for-performance system which bases salary increases on their supervisor's judgment of their job performance.
- The idea of changing the existing five-level performance rating system to a simple "pass/fail" one is supported by only 25 percent of all respondents (59 percent oppose the idea). Interestingly, this idea has more support from first-level supervisors (35 percent) and second-level supervisors (42 percent) than from nonsupervisory employees.

## Training and Development

- Fifty-five percent of the respondents indicate that they had not changed jobs within the 3-year period that preceded completion of the survey. Nonetheless, among this relatively stable group of employees, 40 percent said the nature of the work they performed had changed substantially over that 3-year period.
- Among the employees who had not changed jobs, almost one third (32 percent) say they have not received the training they need to keep pace with changes in those jobs.
- More specifically, 35 percent of these employees also say they are not being trained in new technology as it comes into their work places.

## Job Satisfaction

- Despite dissatisfaction with some of the conditions of their employment, individual job satisfaction among Federal employees remains high. Seventy percent report being satisfied with their jobs—continuing a slowly increasing positive trend over the last 6 years.
- Corresponding to the level of satisfaction regarding the work they do, nearly 9 of every 10 respondents agree that they find their work meaningful.
- Indirectly related to job satisfaction is the finding that trust in, and satisfaction with, immedi-

ate supervisors in the Federal work place has generally improved since the 1986 survey. Over half of the respondents replied favorably to seven of eight statements on various aspects of supervision.

## Conditions of Employment

- Pay is perceived as falling into a range that can be described as marginally adequate to unsatisfactory. While more than one in every four respondents (28 percent) indicate they are satisfied with their current pay, 60 percent express dissatisfaction.
- Based on the content of the written comments returned with the questionnaires, it appears that dissatisfaction with pay is not a stand-alone issue. Rather, it is tightly linked with the negative public image of the Federal Government and a perceived erosion of the conditions of employment. For example:
  - The public image of Federal employees—in the eyes of Federal employees—appears to have come close to rock bottom. Only 8 percent of respondents see this public image as a reason to stay with Federal employment (down from 14 percent in 1986) while 21 percent see it as a reason to leave.
  - Perceived assaults on conditions of employment—particularly retirement, health insurance, and pay—are of concern to the respondents. For example, only 36 percent of the 1989 respondents believe that current Federal health benefits provide a reason to stay in Government—down from 41 percent in 1986. While 72 percent of those employees under the Civil Service Retirement System (replaced by the Federal Employees Retirement System—FERS—in 1984) regard that system as a reason to stay in Government, only about half (52 percent) of those under FERS believe the later system provides a reason to stay in Government.
- Federal employees have long been restricted in the degree to which they may engage in partisan political activity. When asked about their interest in having these statutory restrictions reduced (e.g., through revision of the Hatch Act restrictions), there was no clear consensus. About one-third would like more freedom to be active in partisan political activity, over one-

fourth would not, and two-fifths are in the middle.

- Federal employees have also been subject to plans for random drug testing. When asked about perceptions of drug abuse in the Federal work place, about 4 percent of the respondents believed there was a problem "to a very great extent" or "to a considerable extent" in their work group. (Note: This does not imply that 4 percent of the Federal work force has a serious drug abuse problem but rather that 4 percent of all employees believe there is such a problem. Multiple respondents may be aware of the same problem.)

While over half (53 percent) of the respondents believe there is no drug abuse problem in their immediate work groups, the perception of a problem varies substantially among agencies. Governmentwide, 12 percent of the respondents perceive a problem "to some extent" or greater. Among the departments and agencies, this perception varies from 23 percent of the respondents in one department to 5 percent in another.

## Senior Executive Service

- Over half of the almost 4,500 senior executives who responded to the survey believe that the following four statutory goals of the Senior Executive Service are being met:
  - Recognizing exceptional accomplishment.
  - Ensuring compliance with all applicable civil service rules and regulations, including those related to equal employment opportunity, political activity, and conflicts of interest.

- Appointing career executives to fill SES positions to the extent practicable, consistent with the effective and efficient implementation of agency policy and responsibilities.

- Assuring that senior executives are accountable and responsible for the effectiveness and productivity of employees under them.

- Slightly over four-fifths (83 percent) of these same executives believe the goal of "providing a compensation system designed to attract and retain highly competent senior executives," is not being met. (Since this survey was conducted, however, legislation has been passed which gives the President the option of increasing SES pay levels substantially through Executive Order.)

In conclusion, the 1989 Merit Principles Survey presents a Federal work force reflective of the diverse society of which it is part. Overall, it is a work force that takes pride in what it does and believes that what it does is important. At the same time, it feels buffeted by forces beyond its control and expresses concern about its own quality and potentially diminished capacity in the future.

This survey also identifies some pockets of untapped capacity in the current work force and some obstacles which must be overcome in order to unlock that potential. There is also an identified need to prevent erosion of current work force capabilities. One of the keys to greater work force effectiveness may well lie in the Government's ability to tailor Federal personnel policies and programs to the uneven forces and demands affecting it. In this regard, the views of Federal employees reflected in this report may be useful to the Administration and Congress as they consider changes to the Federal civil service system





# INTRODUCTION

This report discusses key findings from the 1989 Merit Principles Survey, a copy of which is included as an appendix. Through the survey, respondents shared their perceptions about various Federal personnel management issues. This is the third time the Merit Systems Protection Board has conducted a survey of this nature (others were in 1983 and 1986). The survey repeated some questions from the earlier surveys, allowing comparisons over time.

There are more than 2.1 million Federal civilian employees (excluding Postal Service employees), and almost all are paid by tax dollars. Given the cost of managing it, the public has a very real interest in a Government that is efficient, effective, and economical. To serve that interest, the Government must:

- Attract high-quality job applicants;
- Hire a reasonable share of the high-quality applicants;
- Train and develop its employees;
- Motivate its employees to perform at their best; and
- Retain good performers and remove poor ones.

Any employing organization's ability to achieve these goals is closely linked to its personnel policies, systems and procedures. For the Federal civil service, those policies, systems and procedures are inextricably bound by the concept of merit, which is defined through various laws and regulations.

Today the U.S. civil service is experiencing a "quiet crisis"<sup>1</sup> in its ability to meet the goals listed above. There is a body of evidence suggesting that "the Government is not perceived as an 'employer of choice' by many graduates of some of the country's most highly rated academic institutions."<sup>2</sup> And "since the Federal Government employs relatively more managers, professionals, and technicians than other U.S. employers, the skills required of Federal workers are greater, on average, than those of employees in the nation as a whole."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, this attitude towards Federal employment is quite damaging.

Additionally, there is evidence that the Government has trouble keeping its employees. A recent MSPB study answered the question "are too many employees leaving the Government each year?" this way:

For some occupations in some locations, the answer is yes. For other occupations, the answer is no. Where turnover is already a problem \* \* \* there is reason to suspect that it will become worse before it gets better.<sup>4</sup>

Federal white-collar pay is viewed as one key to recruiting and retention problems. It is currently seen as compensating some employees too much and others too little, and lacking the flexibility to make the Government a competitive employer in many areas of the country. Similarly, the Government's systems for distinguishing among employees' levels of performance, for rewarding top performers, and for de-

<sup>1</sup> This term was a product of a 1987 symposium on "A National Public Service for the Year 2000" jointly sponsored by the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "Attracting Quality Graduates to the Federal Government: A View of College Recruiting," June 1988, p.vii.

<sup>3</sup> The Hudson Institute, "Civil Service 2000," A Report Prepared for the U. S. Office of Personnel Management, June 1988, p.10.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "Who is Leaving the Federal Government? An Analysis of Employee Turnover," August 1989, p.3.

# INTRODUCTION

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veloping and training its employees have been criticized.

The survey reported on here provides two views of Federal employment from the employees' perspective. First, it offers their views of how personnel policies, systems and procedures are affecting the Government as an employer. These views are offered at a time when a large number of diverse proposals concerning the current and future Federal civil service are being considered or discussed. Among those proposals are: revamping the white-collar pay system; revising the procedures used to recruit and hire entry-level white-collar employees; changing the way executives, managers, and supervisors are developed and trained; restructuring the Federal employees' health insurance program; increasing

Federal employees' freedom to participate in partisan political activities; and implementing random drug testing for Federal employees. In one way or another, each of these proposals may contribute to solving the "quiet crisis."

Second, the survey offers insights into the cumulative effects of Federal personnel policies, systems, and procedures on the employees' sense of job satisfaction, both with the jobs they perform and with their conditions of employment.

Together with information from other sources, these survey results can be used by policy makers as they weigh alternative actions to take concerning these issues.



## APPROACH

We selected a sample containing 23,971 employees throughout the Federal Government to participate in the survey. Of these, 21,454 employees actually received the questionnaire between early July and mid-October 1989. Over 74 percent (15,939) of those who received the survey returned completed questionnaires.

Participating employees were identified randomly from the Central Personnel Data file (CPDF) maintained by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). We used stratified random sampling techniques to ensure representation by pay plan, grade range, and agency.

The sample was also selected to be representative of the full-time permanent work force of the Federal Government. In preparing this report, we analyzed responses on the basis of such factors as respondents' pay plan and grade level, years of Federal service, sex, age, agency of employment, and educational level.

A word about the reporting of figures in this report is in order. With very few exceptions, percentages are rounded off for reporting purposes. Because of this rounding, cumulative percentages may not total 100 percent.

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# FINDINGS

## I. PERSONNEL POLICIES, SYSTEMS, AND PROCEDURES

### A. The Incidence of Prohibited Personnel Practices

*Overall, employees perceive merit system abuses as infrequent occurrences, although the 1989 perceptions are generally slightly less favorable than those in 1986. For two kinds of abuses relatively high levels of perception occurred: the intrusion of both a "buddy system" and illegal discrimination in personnel selections.*

The Federal personnel system is built upon merit. Beginning in 1883 with the Pendleton Act, the concept of hiring and advancement based on ability has been the system's cornerstone. The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (CSRA) strengthened the merit concept by identifying merit system principles and prohibited personnel practices in law.

We asked all survey respondents whether, over the past 2 years, they had been subjected to any of several of the prohibited personnel practices identified by the CSRA. We asked a similar question in the 1986 survey, permitting comparison of results between the two surveys.

As was true in 1986, the responses do not indicate extensive merit system abuses. However, a sizable proportion (30 percent) of respondents believe they have been denied a job or job reward because of a "buddy system." In addition, a smaller proportion (15 percent) believe they have been denied a job or job reward as a result of prohibited discrimination (e.g., based on race, religion, sex, or handicapping condition). In all but one instance the 1989 responses are slightly less favorable than the 1986 ones.

Table 1 portrays responses to the specific questions we asked about prohibited personnel practices. If the question was asked in 1986, the responses from

that earlier survey are shown in parentheses under the current responses.

The pervasive sense of "buddy system" intrusion into personnel selections is disheartening, not the least because the term is so ill-defined. Likewise, the extent of the perception of illegal discrimination is disturbing. In both instances it is possible that actual incidence is less than the perception suggests—but also in both instances the extent of the perception is damaging to the concept of a system founded on merit. There doesn't appear to be any easy solution to the problem these findings pose.

### B. Quality of Job Applicants and Employees

*For all categories of jobs, the quality of applicants is seen as having worsened over the past 4 years. New hires are seen as being of lower quality than current or former employees.*

Turnover is a fact of life for nearly every organization. To some degree it is welcome, representing a dynamic through which "new blood" enters the organization. The employees acquired as a result of turnover are a key to the organization's future, replacing the skills and ability lost through departing employees and in turn bringing new skills and ability to the work-place. The capabilities of existing employees, and the ability of new employees to equal or surpass those already existing capabilities, determine in large part how well an organization survives over the long haul.

Pressures on organizational survival intensify when major changes occur in how work is accomplished. Changes in the composition of the work force or the employment pool that feeds that work force increase those pressures just as do changes in technology. Projections indicate that employers will be faced with a decreasing pool of job applicants by the year 2000. In addition to putting pressure on organizations to help present employees adapt to change,

# FINDINGS

**Table 1. Employee experience with prohibited personnel practices  
(1986 responses in parentheses)**

"Has this practice happened to you?"	Percent yes	Percent no
Influenced to withdraw from competition for a Federal job in order to help another person's chances for getting a job.	5 (4)	95 (96)
Denied a job or job reward as a result of another person's selection based on his/her family relationship.	6 (6)	94 (94)
Denied a job or job reward as a result of another person's selection based on the "buddy system" without regard to merit.	30 (28)	70 (72)
Denied a job or job reward based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, handicapping condition or marital status.	15 (11)	85 (89)
Pressured to resign or transfer as a result of political affiliation.	2 (1)	98 (99)
Denied a job or job reward as a result of political affiliation.	2 (1)	98 (99)
Asked by someone of authority over you to provide a political contribution or service.	2	98
Subject to reprisal for making a "whistleblower" disclosure.	7	93

these projections also emphasize the importance of an organization's ability to attract a "fair share" of the high-quality workers in the employment pool.

How good is the Federal Government in attracting its "fair share" of high-quality applicants? What is the caliber of its job applicants? How do new hires compare to the people they are joining or replacing in the Federal work force? Our survey addressed these issues through a number of questions.

## 1. Job Applicants

We asked supervisors if they believe the quality of applicants for vacancies in their work units has improved or worsened over the most recent 4 years before the survey. We asked them to rate the quality of various categories of applicants. A similar question was asked in 1986. The responses of those who made judgments are shown in table 2 with 1986 responses shown in parentheses where applicable. The results indicate a noticeable decrease in the quality of job applicants between the 1986 survey (when the responses did not reflect a very positive outlook) and the one in 1989. For every category of job applicant queried, at least 40 percent of the respondents perceived a worsening of quality, and in no case did

as many as 25 percent perceive improvement in the quality of job applicants.

Many respondents wrote comments concerning the quality of job applicants. The following are typical of what they said:

*The problem of attracting quality professionals is not limited to scientists. I am a lawyer. There are plenty of OK candidates for legal positions but the quality of the hiring pool has declined enormously. The finest law schools, once our primary source, are essentially closed to the Government. Unfortunately, no one cares. (A Senior Executive)*

*The quality of clerical applicants continues to be bad, and the quality of professional applicants has worsened, because the Government cannot compete with private sector salaries. (A GM 15 employee)*

*Government service will ultimately be staffed by marginal individuals unable to secure employment in the private sector. We are already seeing this. Competent executives are leaving Government and being replaced by very mediocre people. (A Senior Executive)*

These findings lend urgency to the current debate over issues such as how to revise Federal white-

**Table 2. "In the past 4 years, has the quality of applicants for vacancies in your work group improved or worsened?" (1986 responses in parentheses)**

Category of Vacancy	Percent answering—		
	Somewhat or greatly improved	Remained the same	Somewhat or greatly worsened
Trades and crafts	17 (26)	36 (41)	47 (32)
GS 1-5 clerical or secretarial	14	34	52
GS 6 and above clerical or secretarial (In 1986, category was GS 1-8 clerical)	15 (21)	42 (37)	43 (42)
GS 1-5 technical (e.g., engineering, biological or medical aide, or technician)	20	39	41
GS 6 and above technical (In 1986, category was GS 1-10 technical)	20 (25)	38 (42)	42 (33)
GS 5-7 entry-level professional or administrative	23 (31)	35 (33)	42 (36)
GS 9-12 midlevel professional or administrative	22 (28)	37 (38)	41 (35)
GS or GM 13-15 senior-level professional or administrative	21 (24)	36 (40)	43 (36)
SES or GS 16-18	17 (15)	36 (54)	47 (31)
Other (Not asked in 1986)	10	28	61

collar pay and the hiring practices for entry-level professional and administrative positions. If, as the survey suggests, the quality of applicants that the Federal Government is able to attract is declining, then in time the quality of the Federal work force will also decline.

## 2. Current Employees and New Hires

The effects of an applicant pool of declining quality may already be showing up in the quality of new hires. As can be seen in figure 1, survey respondents view workers who have recently joined their work units from outside the Government as being of lower quality than current or former employees. Where the quality of new hires from outside the Government is concerned, there is little difference among the perceptions of nonsupervisory respon-

dents and those who said they were first- and second-level supervisors.

Slightly higher percentages of supervisors than non-supervisors are positive in their judgments of current employees. About 60 percent of all first-level supervisors and 67 percent of all second-level supervisors believe the quality of their coworkers is above average or outstanding (compared to 53 percent of all respondents).

A number of respondents wrote comments concerning the quality of the current work force. While most were complimentary, they fell within a range shown by the following quotes:

*My office is highly productive and efficient. I believe that I and my subordinates should be paid a salary which reflects the monies we have saved the Govern-*

ment and also the service we provide the Department. (A GM 13-14 employee)

As a non-supervisory professional employee in the expected service, I am constantly frustrated by the declining quality of literacy, human relations skills, and technical skills exhibited by program officers and employees for whom I render legal services. (GS 13-14 employee)

This is the crux of the "quiet crisis"—a work force that appears to be slowly declining in quality at a time when the demands being made on it are increasing. The ultimate effects of this combination of events are unsettling to contemplate. Many respondents offered comments about their fellow employees, or about current employees and new hires. Among the examples listed below, there's something very sad about the first. How many executives working for other employers would flatly state that they do not want their children to work where they do?

The quality of the career workforce is in the midst of a gradual decline. We will always have people willing to take the jobs—they just will not be the type of people or the experience level needed to run large, expensive and technically complex programs. I do not want

either of my children to work here. (A Senior Executive)

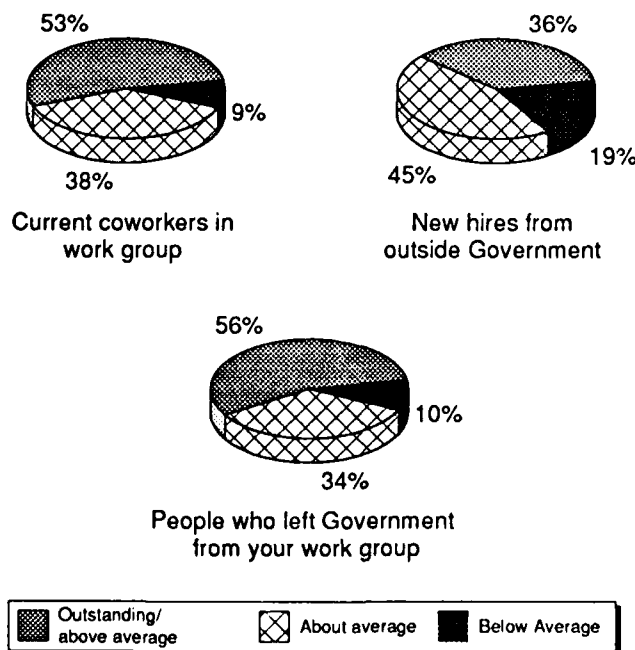
Unfortunately, the reputation and monetary issues pertaining to Federal employees have been abused by the politicians and news media. As a result it is far more difficult to recruit and retain quality personnel. (A Federal Wage System employee)

When I joined the Federal Service years ago I was proud to say I worked for the government, but continuously blaming the bureaucracy for government failures makes it less attractive. College graduates are hired who can't read or write; tests to see their capabilities are ruled unwarranted. Salaries for new hires are not competitive, so the government gets what it pays for—mediocrity. (A GM 13-15 employee)

### C. Keeping Current in the Work Place

About one-third of the employees who have not changed jobs over the past 3 years report not receiving training needed to: (1) keep current with changes in their jobs or (2) use new technology as it enters their workplaces. This suggests that the Federal Government is not doing a good job in keeping its employees current.

Figure 1. Responses to the question "Overall, how would you rate the quality of:"





Some of our questions focused on the issue of changes in the workplace and how well agencies are helping employees stay current with those changes. This is an area of increasing importance, especially in light of projections such as those found in "Civil Service 2000."<sup>5</sup> It appears that the Government's ability to provide high-quality services in the future will increasingly depend on its ability to train and retrain existing staff, or to provide training to newly hired individuals who may not bring all of the required knowledge and skills to the jobs for which they are hired.

Our questions on this subject triggered some written comments from respondents. The following typical comments reflect the range of experiences to which Federal employees are being exposed:

*Training is a joke. There is minimal budget for it and all travel for it has to come from the program's travel budget—very low priority! (A GS 9-12 employee)*

*We are converting from pen and pencil planning products and documents to digital ones. It's a lot of fun. It's challenging, it's tough, it's a vertical learning curve for me and my cohorts in this field. But I don't know how I'm going to get anyone properly trained at most locations to use this technology. We have no staff. The outstanding folks are leaving. The new technology will allow the staff to do a better, a much better job, but nobody can slow down enough from the daily details to learn how to use the new tools. (A GS 9-12 employee)*

*The training I have received from the Government is great. Unfortunately, I may have to use the training for work in the private sector because of cost of living constraints. It is a shame that we spend millions of dollars to train people, only to lose them to private industry. (A GS 9-12 employee)*

More than 9 of every 10 respondents (94 percent) believe they have the skills they need to do their jobs. Additionally, over two-thirds of the respondents believe their jobs make good use of their skills and abilities. In general, the older the employees, the more likely they are to believe the job makes good use of their skills and ability. This may be because people tend to gravitate eventually toward jobs that suit them, or because they eventually accommodate their assigned jobs.

Fifty-five percent of our respondents had not changed jobs within the 3-year period before they completed the survey. Their responses to certain questions offer an opportunity to determine how well employees believe their agencies are helping them deal with changes in the workplace. The questions were directed toward determining whether the nature of each employee's work had changed over the past 3 years; whether the employee had received the training needed to keep pace with changes in the job; and whether they were being trained in new technology.

The responses from the 55 percent who had not changed jobs in the past 3 years are shown in figure 2. The response patterns for the three questions covered by that figure contain a few subtle differences.

Forty percent of the respondents report that the nature of their work had changed substantially over the past 3 years (46 percent said it hadn't). These figures were generally unchanged when we analyzed the responses by men and women respondents, and by those working in headquarters and those in field settings. This gives a suggestion of how much change is taking place in the work performed in Federal offices.

Almost half (46 percent) of the respondents agree that they have received training they needed to keep pace with changes in their jobs. Almost one-third (30 percent) say they have not. The figures for headquarters and field employees are virtually identical. There is a small difference between women and men, with women reporting a slightly higher rate of agreement than men (54 percent to 46 percent). The 32-percent disagreement rate on this issue suggests that Federal agencies are failing to provide training to a large proportion of their employees. If the respondents' perceptions are correct, this creates a potential for long-term adverse consequences for agencies' abilities to carry out their missions.

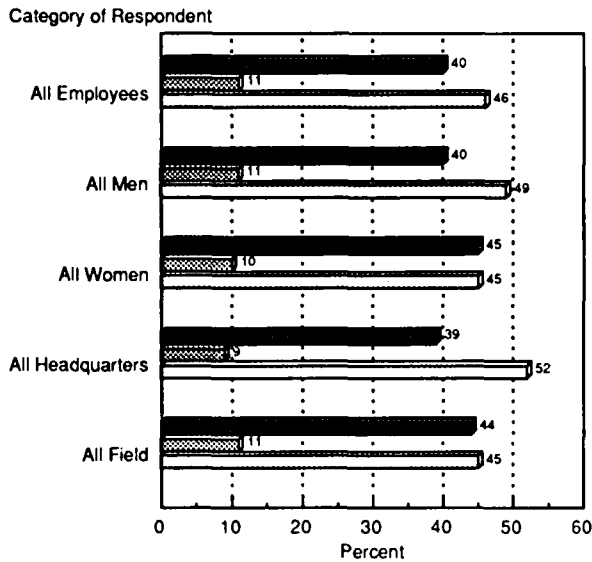
Forty-two percent of the respondents agree that they are being trained in new technology as it comes into their work place (35 percent disagree). Again, headquarters and field employees are almost identical in their response patterns, and a larger proportion of women than men respond favorably. In this instance, however, the difference between women (53 percent agree; 33 percent disagree) and men (41 per-

<sup>5</sup> The Hudson Institute, op. cit., pp.22, 30, and 32.

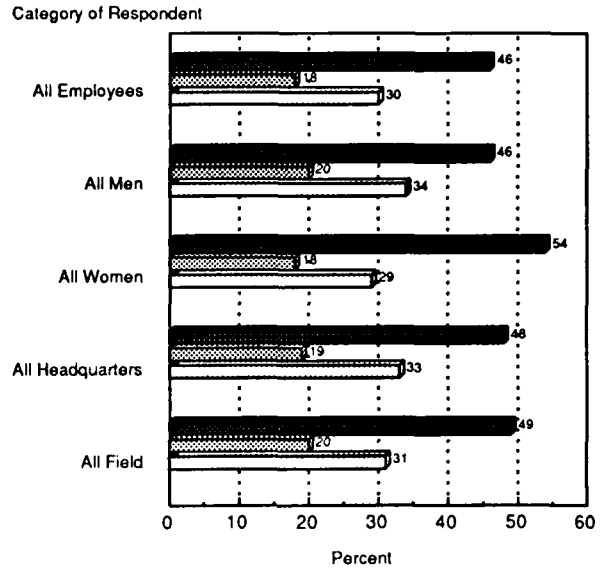
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Figure 2. Three Views of Keeping Current in the Workplace

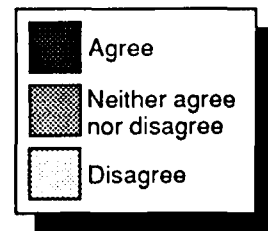
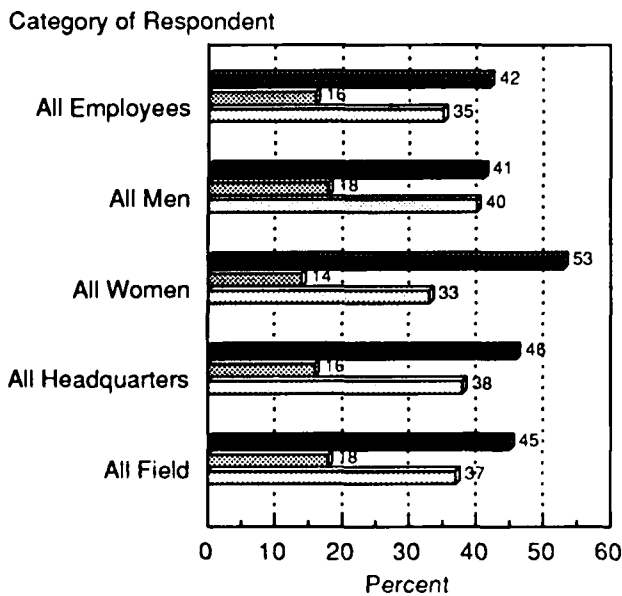
A. "The nature of the work I perform has changed substantially over the past 3 years."



B. "I have received the training I needed to keep pace with my job as it has changed."



C. "I am being trained on new technology as it is brought into my office."



NOTE: All three graphs include only those respondents who had not changed jobs in the past 3 years (56% of all respondents).

cent agree; 40 percent disagree) is appreciably larger. At least in part, this difference may reflect a combination of proportionately more women than men in clerical and similar support jobs and recent significant increases in technologically advanced office automation equipment in Federal offices.

Not surprisingly, the smallest percentages of respondents who say that their jobs have changed substantially are in the SES and supergrade (GS 16-18) groups, while the group with the highest percentage saying their jobs have changed substantially are the GS 1-4's.

SES members and GS 1-4 employees have the highest percentages agreeing that they receive the training they need to keep pace with changes in their jobs (based on the previous statement, it could be argued that these are the two groups with, respectively, the least and most need for this kind of training). Among white-collar groups, GS 13-15 employees have the lowest percentage agreeing with this statement. Among all groups, blue-collar employees have the lowest agreement rate.

SES members also have the highest percentage agreeing that they receive training in new technology as it is introduced to the work place. Among white-collar groups, GS 9-12 and GS 13-15 employees have the lowest percentages agreeing with this statement, but the actual lowest percentage of agreement is among blue-collar employees. The GS 9-12 and blue-collar groups also have the highest percentages of disagreement.

While the supporting evidence is marginal, it's almost an article of faith that when budgets are tight training dollars are very limited. Based on projections such as those found in "Civil Service 2000," this would seem to be a "penny wise, pound foolish" practice. And based on the information provided by our respondents, it would seem that agencies should be more concerned about meeting the training needs of large numbers of their current employees.

**D. Ability to Increase the Quantity or Improve the Quality of Work**

*Relatively large percentages of employees believe that their work units can increase the quantity and quality of the work they perform with the same people.*

The survey explored whether respondents believed the quantity and quality of work performed by their work

units could be increased or improved with the existing employees. This may prove to be a critical issue as tight budgets and restrictions on hiring (plus increased difficulty in finding qualified applicants to fill jobs) join to place pressure on Federal agencies. We also explored this issue in the 1986 survey.

The results, compared to 1986 responses, are shown in figure 3. As was true in 1986, about one-fourth of the respondents believe the amount of work performed in their work groups could be increased to a "very great" or "considerable" extent with the same people (about another one-fourth believe no additional amount can be performed). About 30 percent of the 1989 respondents believe the quality of the work in their unit could be improved to a "very great" or "considerable" extent with the same people, compared to 25 percent in 1986. The 1989 "quantity" and "quality" figures are shared about equally by first- and second-level supervisors and non-supervisory employees.

Clearly, relatively large percentages of employees still see the potential for improvement in the quantity and quality of work performed by their units. Whether agencies are able to take advantage of those perceived opportunities may hinge on other matters. One is the ability and will to provide employees with skills needed as jobs change. Another is the quality of the persons selected for supervisory jobs, since supervisors can strongly influence their employees' desire (and ability) to improve the quantity and quality of their work. Yet another is the extent to which a workable pay-for-performance system can be devised and implemented to strengthen impetus for tapping this potential.

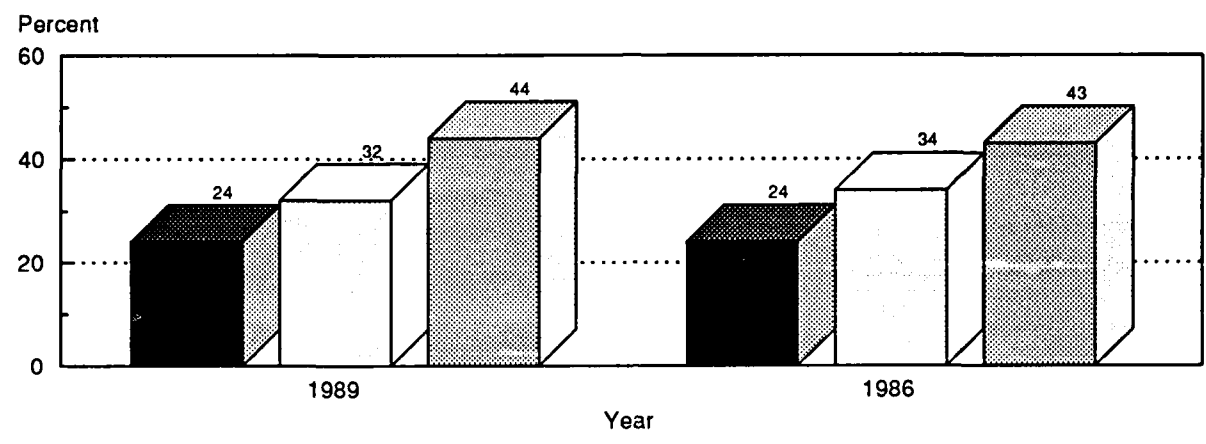
**E. Views of Performance Management Systems**

*The components of the Federal Government's performance management program are not creating an atmosphere that strongly encourages quality performance. One element of performance management—pay for performance—has strong conceptual support among Federal employees, but the operation of existing pay-for-performance systems has far less support. The current performance appraisal systems, which are the heart of the performance management program, are not doing well.*

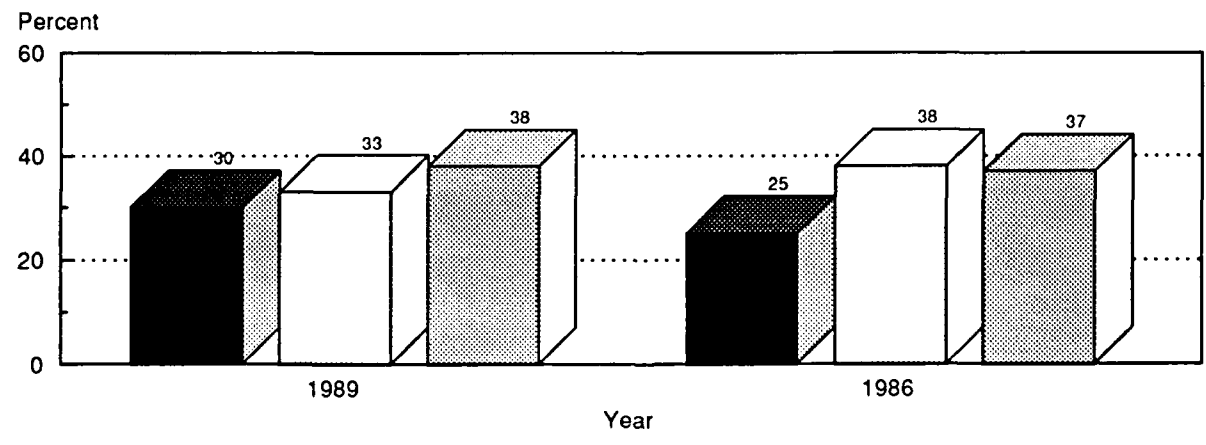
Since civil service reform, emphasis has increasingly been placed on paying Federal employees on the

Figure 3. Responses to "If the people in your work group stayed the same, to what extent do you believe:"

"a. the amount of work done in your area could be increased?"



"b. the quality of work done in your area could be increased?"



Very great or considerable extent
  Some extent
  Little or no extent

NOTE: 1989 "No basis to judge" and 1986 "Don't know" responses omitted.

basis of their performance. Pay for senior executives and GM<sup>6</sup> employees already is set under systems that include pay-for-performance components. For GS and Wage System employees, there are clear links between performance and pay advancement within grade, although this advancement is through "steps" that are determined more by longevity than performance. These latter two systems provide for accelerated advancement for superior performance, and no advancement for poor performance, but both responses are exceptions to the norm.

Since the CSRA was enacted more weight has been given to performance as a factor in pay advancement, and there have been several proposals to revise or eliminate the current "step" increase approach to pay advancement for white-collar GS employees. Some would simply have given more weight to performance in determining eligibility for a step increase; others would have eliminated steps altogether. A recent Administration proposal would eliminate step increases for most white-collar employees, allowing them only for certain categories of employees, and then only until the employees reached salary rates equal to the "going rate" for their jobs.

Because interest in even stronger links between performance and pay is still very real (even for SES and GM employees), our survey asked about attitudes and perceptions towards pay for performance. Our questions ranged from inquiries about attitudes towards the broad concept to specific questions aimed at particular practices.

Almost three-fourths of all respondents (72 percent) agree that a portion of their pay should be based on performance. However, only about two of every five respondents (42 percent) agree that they would choose to be under a pay-for-performance system if they had the choice. A similar proportion (43 percent) disagree. As seen in figure 4, a greater proportion of second-level supervisors than non-supervisors would opt for coverage by such a system:

The distribution of responses by pay plan and grade grouping (figure 5) is also interesting, generally showing that those already under pay-for-performance systems tend to support it. The disposition of the GS 1-4 group towards favoring being under a

pay-for-performance system is unusual in that it doesn't follow the pattern of other groups not currently under such a system.

We specifically asked respondents to comment on why, given a choice, they would or would not want to be under a pay-for-performance system. As might be expected, we got thousands of responses containing almost every conceivable answer. The following examples convey the most common themes we found and the range of the responses:

*Pay for performance is fair. It gives an incentive to all who work to do [their] best. (A GS 5-8 employee)*

*If objective assessment of performance were assured I would [want to be under such a system]. That has never been accomplished. (A GS 9-12 employee)*

*The GM merit pay system works! (A GM 13-14 employee)*

*Merit pay has been a farce at my agency. (A GM 13-14 employee)*

*I'm presently under such a system in the SES and strongly support this approach. (A Senior Executive)*

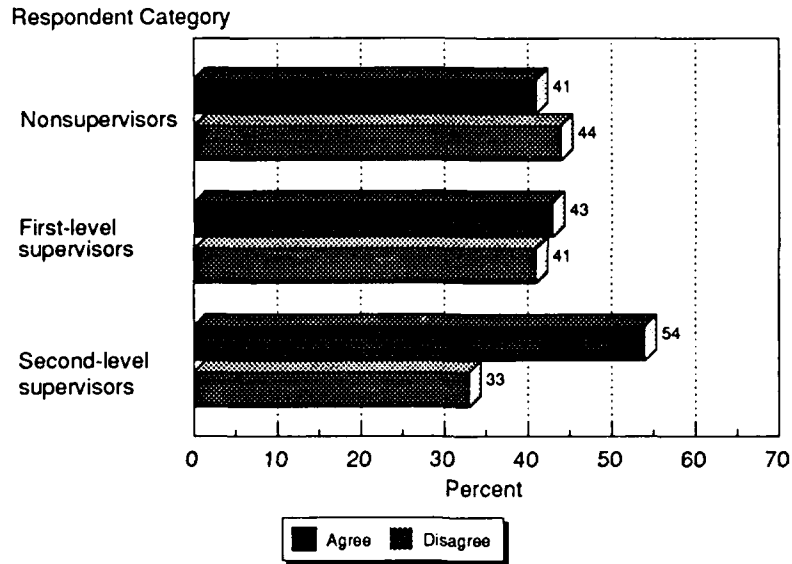
*Pay for performance as now in law does not work. (A Senior Executive)*

Most employees who express reservation about such a system do so based on either or both of the following reasons: (1) doubts that their supervisors could—or would be allowed to—make objective assessments of their performance; and (2) concern that any such system would lack enough money to properly reward the best performers once meaningful distinctions among levels of performance are made. Both of these reasons go to the heart of such a system's operation, not to its concept.

A number of research scientists pointed out that they are under a person-in-the-job classification system (classified under the Research Grade Evaluation Guide, or RGE) that ultimately bases promotions, and hence pay, on performance. They favor that system for their jobs, suggesting that at least one perceived pay-for-performance system may have managed to meet the two concerns mentioned in the pre-

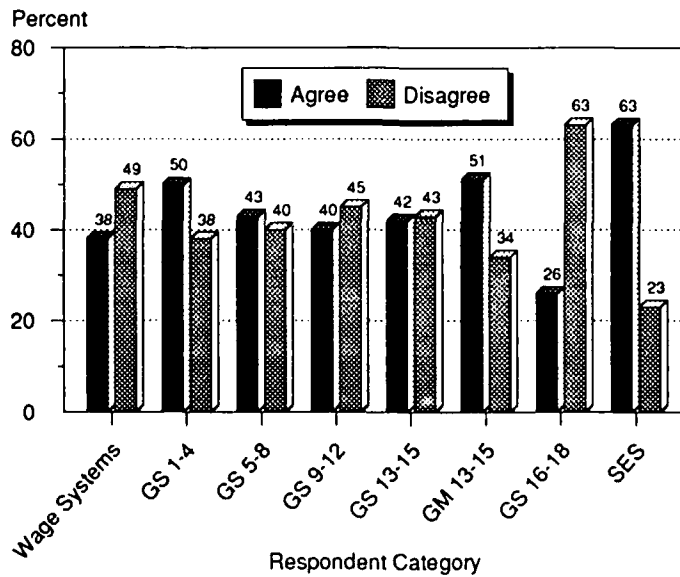
<sup>6</sup> The GM pay plan includes managers, supervisors, and management officials in GS 13, 14, and 15 jobs.

Figure 4. Supervisor/Nonsupervisor responses to "If I had a choice, I would choose to be under a pay-for-performance system \* \* \*."



NOTE: "Neither agree nor disagree" and "Don't know/Can't judge" responses omitted.

Figure 5. Responses by Pay Plan and Grade to "If I had a choice I would choose to be under a pay-for-performance system \* \* \*."



NOTE: "Neither agree nor disagree" and "Don't know/Can't judge" responses omitted.

ceding paragraph. Typically, research scientists' grade assignments are determined by peer panels which apply the grade-determining criteria of the RGEG.

About two-fifths of all respondents agree that their supervisors should have more control over their individual compensation through the performance appraisal system; about a similar proportion disagree.

More than 9 of every 10 respondents had received written performance appraisals within the 12 months before the survey. About 2 percent had not been in the job long enough to get a rating. Over 5 percent report not having been rated within the past 12 months but having been in their jobs long enough to require a rating. This latter figure projects to over 91,500 employees who were in their jobs long enough to be rated but who weren't. While there may have been legitimate reasons many of these employees didn't receive ratings (e.g., they were in long-term training or on detail), the number is large enough to suggest a problem.

Since performance ratings are a key tool in Federal performance management systems, the absence of a performance rating may have negative consequences for the affected employee or the agency. For example, since pay determinations for SES and GM employees are directly linked to the performance rating, the absence of a rating may lead to a "presumptive" one which could in turn result in a smaller or larger merit pay increase than would have been earned by the employee's performance. Similarly, the failure to have a current performance rating may affect an employee's chances for a promotion or a new job in another Federal agency.

To what extent are our respondents involved in determining their performance elements and standards? About one in five says "to a very great" or "considerable" extent, and another one in five says to "some" extent. Nearly three in five say to "little" or "no" extent, with over two of those three answering "no" extent. This distribution could indicate an operational problem since employee participation is required for SES and GM employees and encouraged for other employees. However, 9 of every 10 respondents agree that they understand the performance standards for their jobs, so in practical effect there appears to be little or no problem.

As figure 6 shows, about two-thirds of the survey respondents report that their most recent performance ratings were above fully successful. Most of the remaining one-third report "fully successful" ratings.

As the figure also shows, this self-reported distribution does not vary substantially from the overall distribution of actual performance ratings for the fiscal year immediately before our survey was administered.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents believe their most recent performance ratings were accurate, while almost a third believe they weren't. We tested for a relationship between a rating at or below the fully successful level and a corresponding belief that the rating was not accurate. The relationship was not perfect, but a large proportion of employees with fully successful or lower ratings did not believe the rating was accurate.

What is to be made of a performance rating system in which two-thirds of all employees are rated "above the norm" on their performance? What, indeed, when most of the remaining one-third are rated as meeting the "fully successful" norm and many of them disagree with the accuracy of their ratings? What do these employee responses say about the system? Or about the perception of a "fully successful" rating?

If the Federal Government is serious about establishing and implementing pay systems based on performance, it appears that substantial improvement is needed in the system used to measure performance. Certainly, employee acceptance of the "fully successful" rating needs improving.

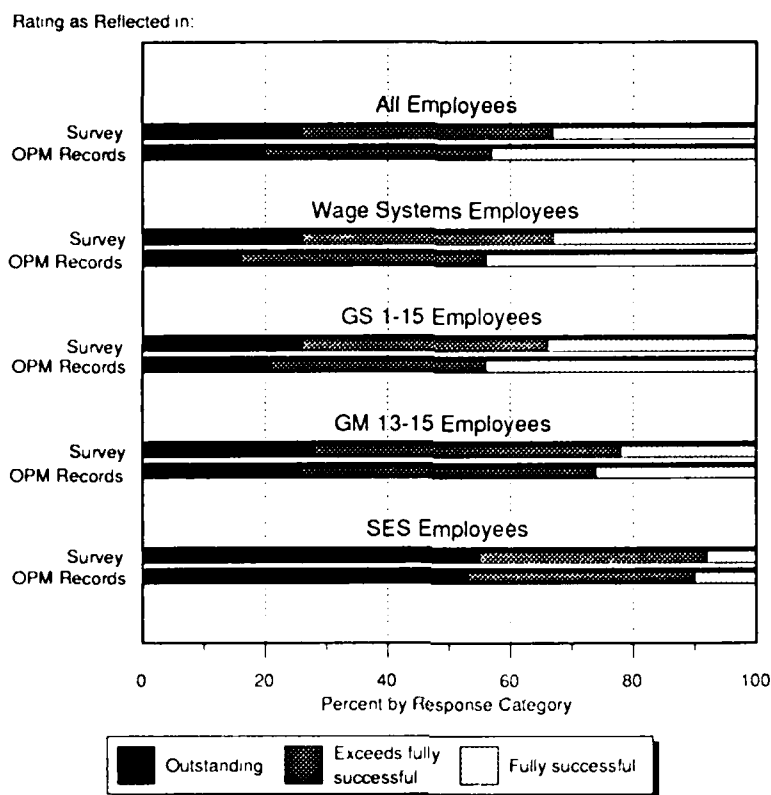
Only about one in five respondents agrees that part of their pay should be based on the performance of their work group, while more than two of every three disagree with this idea. Consideration of group performance in determining individual ratings is permitted under current Federal performance rating regulations and may be a fairly common practice in rating many SES and GM employees.

We also asked to what extent different people should play a role in each respondent's performance appraisal rating. The choices offered in the questionnaire included the individual being rated, coworkers, and both first- and second-level supervisors. As figure 7 shows, immediate supervisors and the individual being rated are the strong choices for involvement in the rating process. Peer involvement, suggested by some Federal unions, doesn't enjoy strong support.

About 20 percent of the respondents agree that there should be a limit on the number of high performance ratings that can be given, while more than 50

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Figure 6. Distribution of Fully Successful or Higher Ratings as Reported by Survey Respondents and as Shown in OPM Files



NOTE: OPM data are for FY 1988 (as of October 1988 for GM and Sept. 30, 1988, for SES employees). GS 10-12 employees omitted.

percent disagree. And about 25 percent of all respondents agree that the performance rating system should be changed to a "pass-fail" system, while about 60 percent disagree. Concerning this latter point, the difference by supervisory status shown in figure 8 is interesting, particularly since many second-level supervisors—those most in favor of "pass-fail"—may well be responsible for approving ratings for individuals under the GM pay-for-performance system and thus directly affecting their pay). Could it be that the apparent lack of a ringing endorsement for the current five-step system reflects frustration about the ability of that system to permit sufficiently meaningful pay distinctions among the top three levels of performance?

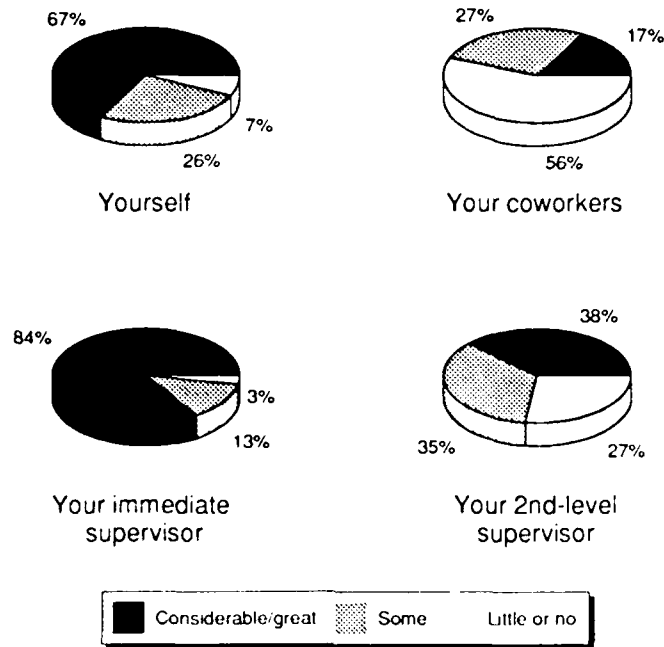
Each of the several Federal pay systems makes provision for various forms of monetary incentives based on performance. These incentives include cash awards, bonuses, and quality step increases.

We asked the respondents to tell us to what extent those monetary incentives influenced their decision to stay with or leave Federal employment. About one-third of the respondents see these incentives as reasons to continue working for the Federal Government. A somewhat smaller proportion see these incentives as reasons to leave.

We also asked respondents to what extent it was likely that they would receive certain kinds of tangible and intangible recognition if they performed better. Their answers, shown in table 3, make two points: Federal employees believe they are more likely to receive informal than formal recognition for better performance; and the situation didn't change much between 1986 and 1989. Further analyses of the 1989 responses shows no important distinctions between men and women, or employees in headquarters settings compared to those in field offices.

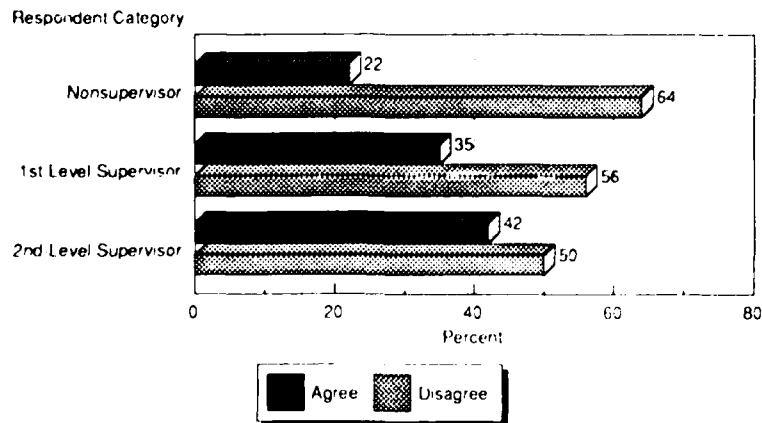


Figure 7. Responses to "To what extent should each of the following be allowed to provide input into your performance rating?"



NOTE: "No basis to judge" responses omitted

Figure 8. Responses to "I would like to see the existing 5-level performance rating system changed to a simple 'pass/fail' one."



NOTE: "Neither agree nor disagree" and "Don't know/Can't judge" responses omitted

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**Table 3. 1989 and 1986 responses to "If you perform better, how likely is it that you will receive:"**

Kind of recognition	Percent very or somewhat likely		Percent very or somewhat unlikely	
	1989	1986	1989	1986
More pay (e.g., bonus, promotion, cash award)	36	32	54	55
Nonpay rewards (e.g., letter of recognition)	33	37	54	47
Informal recognition (e.g., told you are doing good work)	61	62	29	26

In 1986 and 1989, a respective 32 and 36 percent of respondents believed they would receive more pay for performing better—both about double the 17 percent figure recorded in 1983. In addition, the 37 percent in 1986 and 33 percent in 1989 who believed they would receive nonpay rewards for performing better were an improvement over 1983's 23 percent. In both instances, however, there is room for substantial improvement in the perceived link between recognition (including pay) and performance.

## F. How Employees View Their Immediate Supervisors

*Supervisors appear to be doing fairly good jobs in meeting their supervisory responsibilities. However, some 30 to 50 percent of the respondents believe there is room for their supervisors to improve that performance.*

While employees seldom get an opportunity to "rate" supervisors, in a sense we gave our 1989 respondents an opportunity to do so. We asked the respondents to show their agreement or disagreement with eight statements aimed at establishing how employees view their immediate supervisors. The statements addressed such supervisory responsibilities or traits as maintaining effective two-way communications, having good leadership skills, and treating their employees fairly. One statement dealt with the trust and confidence employees have in their immediate supervisors. With one exception, these statements had been included in our 1986 survey. The re-

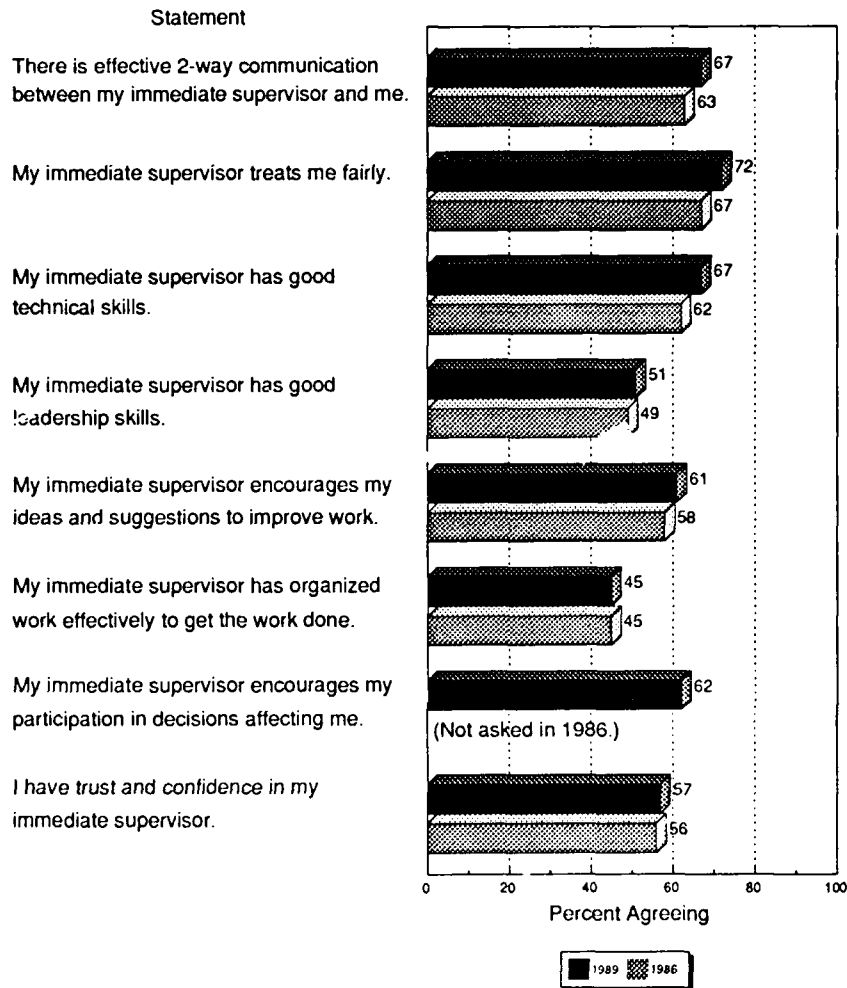
sults, including comparisons with 1986, are shown in figure 9.

Generally speaking, the 1989 results are favorable. Of eight supervisory responsibilities covered, there is only one ("has organized our work group effectively to get the work done") where fewer than half of the respondents agree with the statement. In most instances the agreement level is at or above 60 percent. A hopeful sign is that, of the seven statements that were repeated from 1986, six show at least a little improvement in the percentage of employees agreeing.

While a majority of the respondents give their supervisors good marks on most of the issues we asked about, some 30 to 50 percent of the respondents do not do so. Federal agencies can expect to experience increasingly tight budgets and limited personnel ceilings, which will increase pressure on them to do better with what they have. In turn, such expectations will place added strain on first-line and higher supervisors. And as MSPB has reported elsewhere, the "selection strategy typically used by most agencies [to fill first-line supervisory jobs] may not be adequate for meeting selection needs in all situations."<sup>7</sup> While it appears desirable—and may be possible—to improve the skills of existing supervisors, it may be critical to good government that the techniques for selecting future supervisors be improved. We simply won't be able to let supervisors learn "on the job" in the future.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "First Line Supervisory Selection in the Federal Government", June 1989, Overview.

**Figure 9. Percent of 1989 and 1986 Respondents Agreeing to "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your immediate supervisor?"**



**G. Managing People—Dealing With Poor Performance and Misconduct**

*Supervisors are generally willing to deal with performance and disciplinary problems. They view the effectiveness of the options available to them for this purpose (e.g., taking formal action, putting the employee on a performance improvement plan) less favorably, or about as favorable, as the respondents to the 1986 survey.*

One of the most onerous tasks facing supervisors is dealing with problem employees. Problems generally fall into two categories: poor performance or misconduct. Sometimes these two are linked to-

gether. Since problem employees can disrupt the work of others and reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of the Government's services, it's important for supervisors to remove the problem—which in the last resort may mean removing the employee.

We asked supervisors about their dealings with problem employees within the most recent 2 years before the survey. About 40 percent say they had not dealt with any problem employees within that time frame. About 25 percent had dealt with at least one performance problem, and about a similar proportion had dealt with at least one problem involving both poor performance and misconduct. Only about 7 percent had dealt with at least one problem employee involving only misconduct. The roughly

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60 percent that had dealt with at least one problem employee is very similar to the 64 percent that reported doing so in the 1986 survey. The respondents who had dealt with a problem within the most recent 2 years report that their most recent problem was based on:

- Poor performance . . . . . 47%
- Misconduct . . . . . 19%
- Both poor performance and misconduct . . . 34%

We then asked the supervisors to report the actions they had taken in dealing with the problem employees, and the effect they perceived those actions as having. Tables 4-A, 4-B, and 4-C show the reported actions and results, with 1986 data shown in parentheses.

Concentrating on the column "made things better" for performance and misconduct cases reveals an un-

desirable pattern between 1986 and 1989 in most instances—fewer supervisors in 1989 than in 1986 generally perceive the actions they've taken as likely to make things better. Since we didn't ask about "mixed problems" in 1986, comparative data aren't provided.

Table 4-B shows that in both 1989 and 1986, 7 to 14 percent of the supervisors "gave the employee a less than satisfactory rating" and/or "placed the employee on a Performance Improvement Plan" for misconduct. Both are corrective actions normally associated with performance, rather than misconduct, problems. The survey doesn't provide information about why supervisors take specific corrective actions or what they define as "misconduct." It may be, however, that both the performance rating process and a Performance Improvement Plan improve communication between supervisors and problem employees, thereby proving helpful in a wide range of situations.

**Table 4-A. What supervisors say they're doing about poor performers (1986 responses in parentheses)**

Action taken	Percent taking action	Percent agreeing the action <sup>1</sup> —			
		Made things better	Made no difference	Made things Worse	No basis to judge
Counseled and worked with employee informally	90 (90)	47 (60)	47 (37)	3 (1)	3 (2)
Referred employee to counseling service	18 (14)	25 (32)	58 (55)	3 (7)	14 (6)
Gave employee less than satisfactory rating	30 (28)	34 (33)	43 (48)	20 (15)	4 (4)
Placed employee on a Performance Improvement Plan	26 (13)	52 (56)	37 (34)	8 (5)	4 (5)
Initiated formal action against employee	18 (22)	49 (51)	39 (36)	9 (9)	3 (4)
Took no action	3 (2)	* (14)	68 (29)	2 (4)	29 (53)
Haven't decided yet	4 (4)				

<sup>1</sup> Respondents evaluated the effect only of actions they reported taking.

\*Less than 1 percent.

**Table 4-B. What supervisors say they're doing about misconduct problems  
(1986 responses in parentheses)**

Action taken	Percent agreeing the action <sup>1</sup> —				
	Percent taking action	Made things better	Made no difference	Made things Worse	No basis to judge
Counseled and worked with employee informally	75 (79)	48 (52)	37 (44)	12 (3)	3 (1)
Referred employee to counseling service	30 (29)	28 (34)	51 (58)	7 (2)	14 (6)
Gave employee less than satisfactory rating	14 (12)	24 (36)	62 (54)	13 (8)	* (2)
Placed employee on a Performance Improvement Plan	10 (7)	54 (52)	42 (23)	4 (25)	* (0)
Initiated formal action against employee	49 (44)	48 (61)	35 (20)	11 (6)	5 (13)
Took no action	* (3)	21 (13)	34 (36)	0 (3)	45 (48)
Haven't decided yet	1 (4)				

<sup>1</sup> Respondents evaluated the effect only of actions they reported taking.

\* Less than 1 percent.

**Table 4-C. What supervisors say they're doing about combined poor performance and misconduct problems  
(Responses were not reported in 1986)**

Action taken	Percent agreeing the action <sup>1</sup> —				
	Percent taking action	Made things better	Made no difference	Made things Worse	No basis to judge
Counseled and worked with employee informally	87	46	46	6	2
Referred employee to counseling service	39	27	57	10	7
Gave employee less than satisfactory rating	32	28	57	14	2
Placed employee on a Performance Improvement Plan	27	52	34	7	7
Initiated formal action against employee	46	50	35	10	5
Took no action	5	4	44	18	35
Haven't decided yet	3				

<sup>1</sup> Respondents evaluated the effect only of actions they reported taking.

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## H. The Senior Executive Service

*Senior executives view most of the objectives of the SES as being met at least somewhat by their agencies, although the percentages choosing "completely or somewhat successful" tend to be lower than were found in the 1986 survey. The objective viewed as least successfully met is that of "providing a compensation system designed to attract and retain highly competent senior executives." The survey was completed before recent legislation increasing senior executives' pay was passed, so the effect of that legislation on executives' perceptions is not reflected in these results.*

The Senior Executive Service was created by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 to provide the Federal Government with a corps of highly motivated and competent executives. The first ("charter") members of the SES were offered both greater risks and greater rewards than had been typical in the "super-grade" (GS 16, 17, and 18) jobs from which most originally came. There are about 6,500 members of the SES. Out of that number, slightly over 400 are political appointees. By law, not more than 10 percent of SES positions may be filled by political appointees.

Here is a profile of the SES respondents to our survey (the categories are not mutually exclusive):

Charter members . . . . .	29%
Been in the SES 5 or more years . . . . .	58%
Career appointment . . . . .	96%
Women . . . . .	9%
Work in field location . . . . .	31%
Work for: Political executive . . . . .	26%
Career executive . . . . .	64%
Military executive . . . . .	9%
Supervise other members of the SES . . . . .	31%

We asked SES respondents their views of how successful their agencies are in meeting the 14 objectives CSRA defined for the SES. Their responses are shown in table 5. More often than not, the responses show that agencies are viewed as meeting most of the objectives at least somewhat.

Most of the questions concerning the SES objectives were also asked in the 1986 survey. Where a question was repeated, table 5 shows the 1986 response in parentheses beneath the current one. Although the 1989 responses continue to indicate a general sense of the objectives being met, in most instances that view is not as favorably held as it was in 1986.

Four objectives are viewed by half or more of the respondents as being met at least somewhat: (1) assuring that senior executives are accountable and responsible for the effectiveness and productivity of employees under them; (2) recognizing exceptional performance; (3) complying with all civil service rules and regulations; and (4) filling SES positions with career employees to the extent practicable. As was the case in 1986, "providing a compensation system designed to attract and retain highly competent senior executives" is the objective the lowest percentage of SES members believe is being met. Since this survey was conducted, however, legislation has been passed which gives the President the option of increasing SES pay levels substantially through Executive Order. Should that occur, this perception could significantly change.

Our respondents' view that the SES pay system has largely failed to meet its statutory compensation objective mirrors the responses from former members of the SES to a survey initiated by MSPB in October 1988. As MSPB has reported,<sup>8</sup>

\*\*\* a monetary reason—dissatisfaction over the possible continuation of an SES pay cap—was the single most often cited reason for leaving the Federal service. It was cited by 57 percent of the respondents and the percentage citing that reason did not vary significantly between those retired and those who resigned.

About one in 10 SES members surveyed in 1989 believes the SES performance appraisal system has improved organizational effectiveness; about 6 in 10 do not. About one-fourth of the SES members be-

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "The Senior Executive Service, Views of Former Federal Executives," October 1989, p.9.

**Table 5. How current SES members evaluate efforts to meet SES objectives, 1989 and 1986<sup>1</sup>  
(1986 responses in parentheses)**

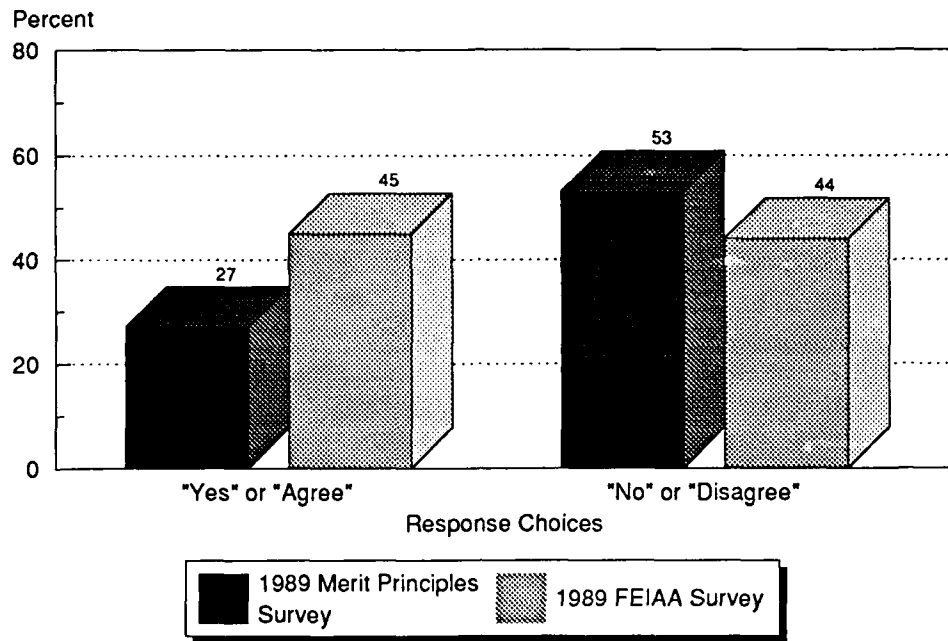
"How successful is your agency in meeting these objectives?"	Percent responding—		
	Completely or somewhat successful	Neither	Completely or somewhat unsuccessful
Basing compensation, retention, and tenure on executive success measured in terms of individual and organizational performance.	35 (48)	18 (17)	39 (32)
Assuring that senior executives are accountable and responsible for the effectiveness and productivity of employees under them.	54 (63)	17 (17)	24 (19)
Recognizing exceptional performance.	51 (55)	13 (15)	31 (29)
Enabling the head of an agency to reassign senior executives to best accomplish the agency's mission.	32 (39)	20 (23)	32 (27)
Providing severance pay, early retirement, and placement assistance for senior executives who are removed from the SES for nondisciplinary reasons.	9 (13)	10 (15)	10 (12)
Protecting senior executives from arbitrary or capricious actions.	24 (27)	14 (18)	25 (26)
Providing for program continuity and policy advocacy in the management of public programs.	46 (53)	19 (22)	17 (16)
Ensuring accountability for honest, economical, and efficient government.	49 (55)	23 (24)	17 (15)
Providing for the initial and continuing systematic development of highly competent senior executives.	38 (38)	21 (24)	34 (34)
Providing for an executive system which is guided by the public interest and free from improper political interference.	46 (43)	18 (21)	26 (30)
Providing a compensation system designed to attract and retain highly competent senior executives.	7 (13)	9 (14)	79 (71)
Maintaining a merit personnel system free from prohibited personnel practices. <sup>2</sup>	47	19	22
Ensuring compliance with all applicable civil service rules and regulations, including those related to equal employment opportunity, political activity, and conflicts of interest. <sup>2</sup>	54	20	14
Appointing career executives to fill SES positions to the extent practicable, consistent with the effective and efficient implementation of agency policy and responsibilities. <sup>2</sup>	56	15	18

<sup>1</sup> Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding or not reporting of "Don't Know" or "Can't Judge" responses.

<sup>2</sup> These questions were not asked in 1986.

# FINDINGS

Figure 10. SES and FEI\* Alumni Responses to Questions Concerning Whether They Would Recommend Federal Employment to Others.



- Notes:
1. Merit Principles Survey responses were limited to members of the SES at the time of the survey.
  2. Merit Principles Survey question was "I would recommend the Federal Government as a place to work." Response choices ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."
  3. FEIAA survey respondents were alumni of FEI, including active, retired, and former members of the SES and of GS/GM-15 positions.
  4. FEIAA question was "Encourage Federal career to young people." Response choices were "yes" and "no."
  5. Responses that were neither affirmative nor negative are omitted.

\* Federal Executive Institute (survey conducted by FEI Alumni Association)

lieve the bonus/rank award system is a strong incentive; over half do not. Roughly 18 percent of the respondents believe "there are enough bonuses so that if I perform well I have a good chance of receiving one." This compares to 19 percent in 1986, and 10 percent in 1983 (when we first asked the question).

Written comments from senior executives mirror the concerns identified above, focusing largely on inadequate pay. Other issues also surface, however, including some that are not negative. The range of is-

sues raised by senior executives is shown by the following quotes:

*Cast my vote for the recertification concept—if I don't perform to the level required and to my full capability, reduce the salary and reassign to a lower grade.*

*The great harm of the SES has been the muffling of independent views through the power to award bonuses. When the head of the agency's staff controls your pay, he is in a much better position to control what you say.*



*\*\*\* junior SESers never get into the bonus pool for years—and the bonus is too small to provide a real performance incentive.*

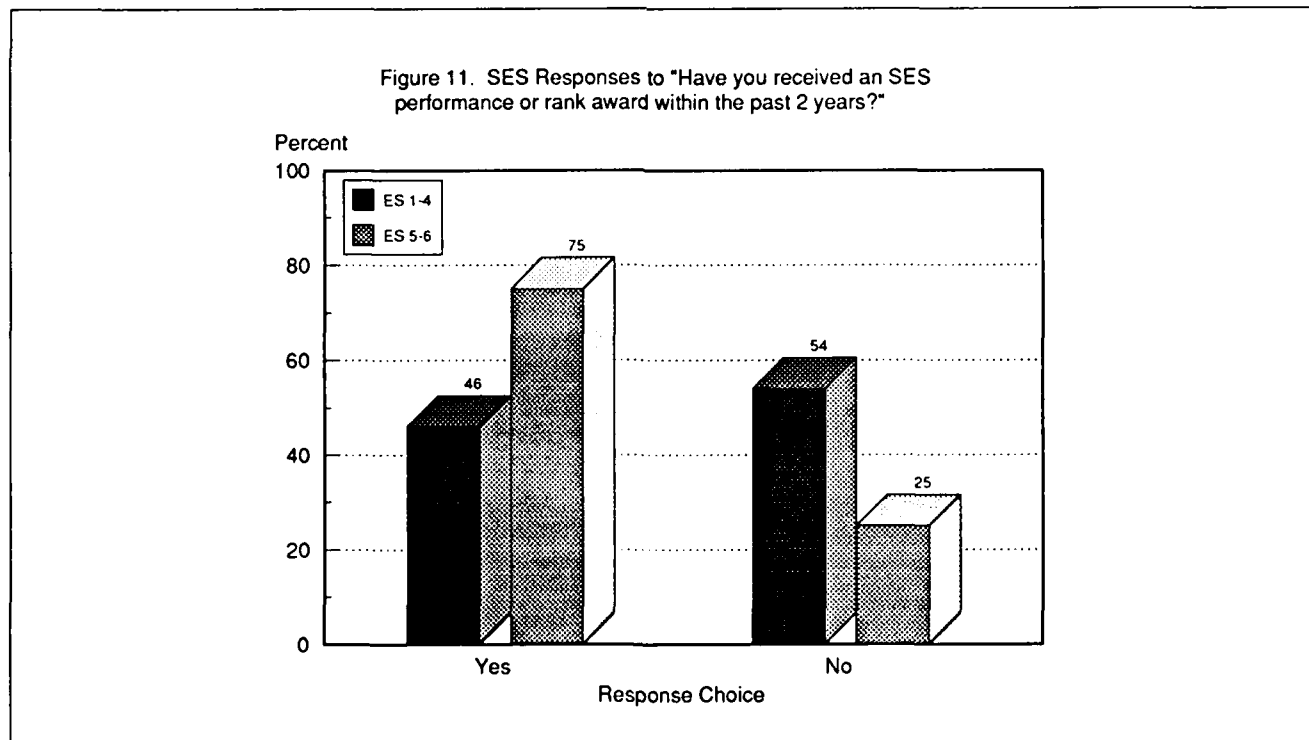
*The combined image of Federal Employees (including federal employee "bashing" by prior administrations) coupled with low executive pay comparability make staying in Federal Service very difficult for mission-oriented executives. This is the only employer I have had whose basic philosophy towards employees demonstrates a conviction that all employees are motivated by a desire to cheat the employer.*

*Many SES personnel are subject to arbitrary political pressure to leave, transfer, or make improper decisions. Some political executives have little understanding of career executives' roles, and do not want the advice or assistance of careerists.*

Only about 27 percent of current SES members would recommend Federal employment to others, while 53 percent would not. As figure 10 shows, these are somewhat more discouraging figures than were obtained by the Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association<sup>9</sup>

(FEIAA) in response to a similar question it asked in an October 1989 survey of association members.<sup>10</sup> The question FEIAA asked focused on encouraging young people to pursue a Federal career. Among FEIAA respondents, about 45 percent said yes and about the same percentage said no. The difference in results between the two surveys may be in the response groups. The MSPB respondents were all current SES employees; the FEIAA survey was answered by current and former Federal employees, both in the SES or equivalent, or GS 16-18 jobs (54 percent) and in GS/GM 15 or equivalent jobs (45 percent), who are alumni of the Federal Executive Institute. While the figures differ, neither response group gave Federal employment a positive boost.

Overall, 52 percent of the SES respondents to our survey say they had received a performance or rank award in the past two years, while 48 percent say they had not. This varied greatly between two SES pay groupings (ES 1-4 and ES 5-6), as is seen in figure 11.



<sup>9</sup> The Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association is an organization of current and former Federal employees who, as senior executives or GS/GM-15's or equivalent, have attended the Federal Executive Institute.

<sup>10</sup> Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association, "FEIAA Newsletter No. 139, January 1990, Summary Results of 1989 Survey," p.3.

# FINDINGS

Although over half of the SES respondents say they had received an award in the past 2 years, we've already noted that fewer than one in five (18 percent) agree that there are enough bonuses that they have a good chance to get one if they perform well. About three-fourths (74 percent) disagreed. Just over one of every four (27 percent) of the SES respondents agree that the bonus/rank award system is a strong incentive for them to do their best (over half (56 percent) disagree). Only 15 percent of the respondents agree that the SES performance appraisal process has improved organizational effectiveness, while 62 percent disagree.

Over half of the SES respondents (56 percent) believe scientists and technical experts should have their own system comparable to the SES rather than being part of the SES (28 percent disagree).

## II. SATISFACTION WITH THE JOB AND WITH CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

In part one we reported employee views of how personnel policies, systems, and procedures affect the Government as an employer. This second part looks at employees' satisfaction with their jobs and their conditions of employment.

### A. Overall Job Satisfaction

*A substantial majority of Federal employees are satisfied with their jobs.*

The level of job satisfaction among Federal employees remains fairly high. In response to a specific question directed at their job satisfaction, 70 percent of the respondents say they are satisfied. As figure 12 shows, this is a slight improvement over 1986, and continues a positive trend since 1983.

Additionally, 88 percent of the respondents agree that they find their work meaningful (up from 81 percent in 1986). And just over two-thirds of the respondents say that their present jobs make good use of their skills and abilities.

Despite this high level of job satisfaction, only about half (49 percent) of the respondents say they would recommend the Federal Government as a place to work. Over one-fourth (28 percent) say they would not make this recommendation. The responses to

this question vary considerably by types of employees and grade ranges, as shown in figure 13.

Note that, with the exception of the SES and GS 16-18 respondent groups, the tendency is for the level of agreement to decline, and the level of disagreement to increase, as the white-collar grade level rises.

Most of the respondents included written comments in the space provided on their surveys. The written comments on this topic presented a very bleak outlook intensified by the fact that most were from Senior Executives (the group with the most negative outlook). The following three comments are typical in their tone and content:

*Have had a wonderful career but would not go into Federal Government today or recommend such with the current image and pay and benefits packages. (A Senior Executive)*

*As a citizen I worry about our rush to a mediocre civil service, but I would discourage my children from joining it primarily because of poor public image (how many company executives routinely bash their own employees?) and secondarily because of uncompetitive pay and benefits. (A Senior Executive)*

*I have had a very rewarding professional experience. However, today the salaries are completely out of balance. I plan to stay in my job, which I love, but I*

Figure 12. Positive Responses to "In general, I am satisfied with my current job," 1983-1989.

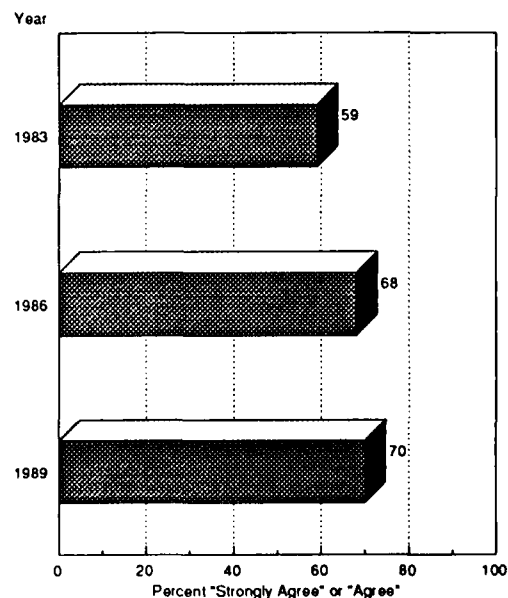
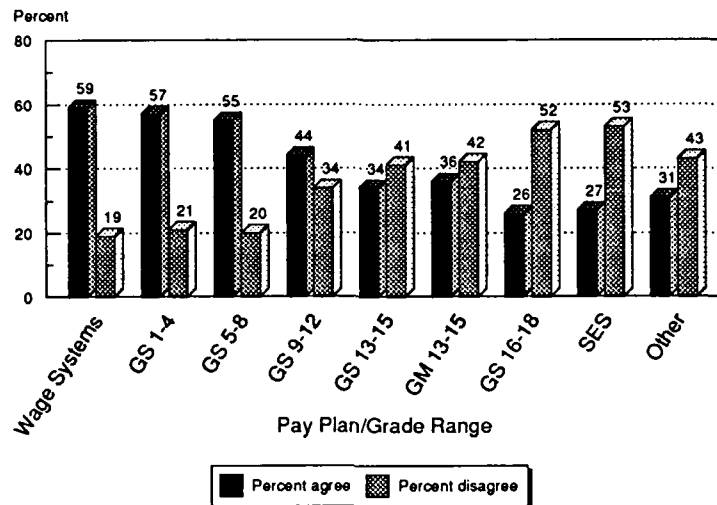


Figure 13. How Various Groups of Employees Responded to "I would recommend the Federal Government as a place to work."



Note: "Neither agree nor disagree" and "Don't know/Can't judge" responses omitted.

*would not counsel my son to enter Federal service, absent an adjustment in pay. (A Senior Executive)*

Over one-fourth (28 percent) of all respondents say they will actively seek a new Federal Government job outside their work units in the next year (46 percent say they won't). Additionally, 13 percent say they will look for a job outside the Federal Government.

## B. Satisfaction With Conditions of Employment

It isn't unreasonable to posit that people who really like their jobs will accept—or at least tolerate—unfavorable conditions of employment as long as those conditions are overshadowed by the satisfaction created by the job. Thus, NASA engineers, technicians, and other personnel supporting the launch of a space shuttle might willingly work immense periods of overtime under tense conditions (disrupting their lives and those of their families) for the intrinsic satisfaction of being part of a successful mission. However, at some point those unfavorable "other" conditions may weigh so heavily in the satisfaction equation that they overbalance the satisfaction found in the work itself. Therefore, it's in the best interest of employers to ensure as a minimum that these "other" conditions of employment—which

may include pay, benefits, and personnel policies and procedures—don't weigh on the negative side of the balance.

In the preceding section we noted that while most Federal employees are satisfied with their jobs and find those jobs meaningful, only about half would recommend the Federal Government as an employer. Logically, this is a contradiction. Is it a sign that the Federal Government is relying heavily on job satisfaction to keep its workers, and that other conditions of employment are now outweighing that intrinsic one? A number of questions we asked may shed light on this possibility.

### 1. General

*Several factors that are traditionally viewed as reasons to remain in Federal employment have lost strength as retention factors between the 1986 and 1989 surveys. These include: the intrinsic value of the work itself; salary; current health insurance benefits; and opportunity to have an impact on public affairs.*

We asked respondents how a number of different factors weighed on their decisions to stay with or leave Federal employment. Most of the factors were

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also identified in the 1986 survey. Figure 14 shows the distribution of responses, including 1986 information where available.

The relative frequency of respondents designating the items as a reason to stay has not altered since 1986. However, there are some shifts in the strength of specific items as a retention factor. For example, a greater percentage of respondents in 1989 than in 1986 perceive job security as a reason to stay.

Compared to 1986, lesser percentages of 1989 respondents perceive the following items as a reason to stay:

- The work itself (the work they are performing);
- Salary;
- Job opportunities outside Government;
- Opportunity to have an impact on public affairs; and
- Current health insurance benefits.

Some respondents wrote comments that illustrate the strength of their feelings on these issues. For example:

*[Low pay] coupled with poor health benefits makes the Federal service less and less attractive. Attempting to hire clericals is next to impossible. It is no longer a question of whether there will be an employment and service crisis in the Federal Government; the only question is when the media and the average citizen recognizes it. (A GM 13-14 employee)*

*Unfortunately, the reputation and monetary issues pertaining to Federal employees have been abused by the politicians and news media. As a result it is far more difficult to recruit and train qualified personnel. (A Federal Wage System employee.)*

*In most areas, including Washington, DC, Federal pay/compensation is so out-of-line with reality that effective recruiting is impossible. You get what you pay for. In the world today the U.S. cannot survive with a "bargain basement" government. Serving the public (who generally do not appreciate your service) no longer represents an incentive. (A Senior Executive)*

*The Administration needs to work very hard to generate a positive image of Federal employees to the public. Otherwise, we'll soon have the kind of civil servants the public perceives. The U.S. deserves the best! (A Senior Executive)*

*The present pay scales at the clerical and upper professional and managerial levels [plus] the years of constant bashing of government employees by politicians at all levels [have] created an aura so adverse to public service in this country that the ability to attract and retain the best and brightest, that once existed, has been virtually destroyed. (A Senior Executive)*

If, as the results suggest, the intrinsic value of the job being performed is losing its power to keep employees, and if other key components in the stay/leave equation are not contributing to the satisfaction side, then the outlook for retaining a high-quality Federal work force is discouraging.

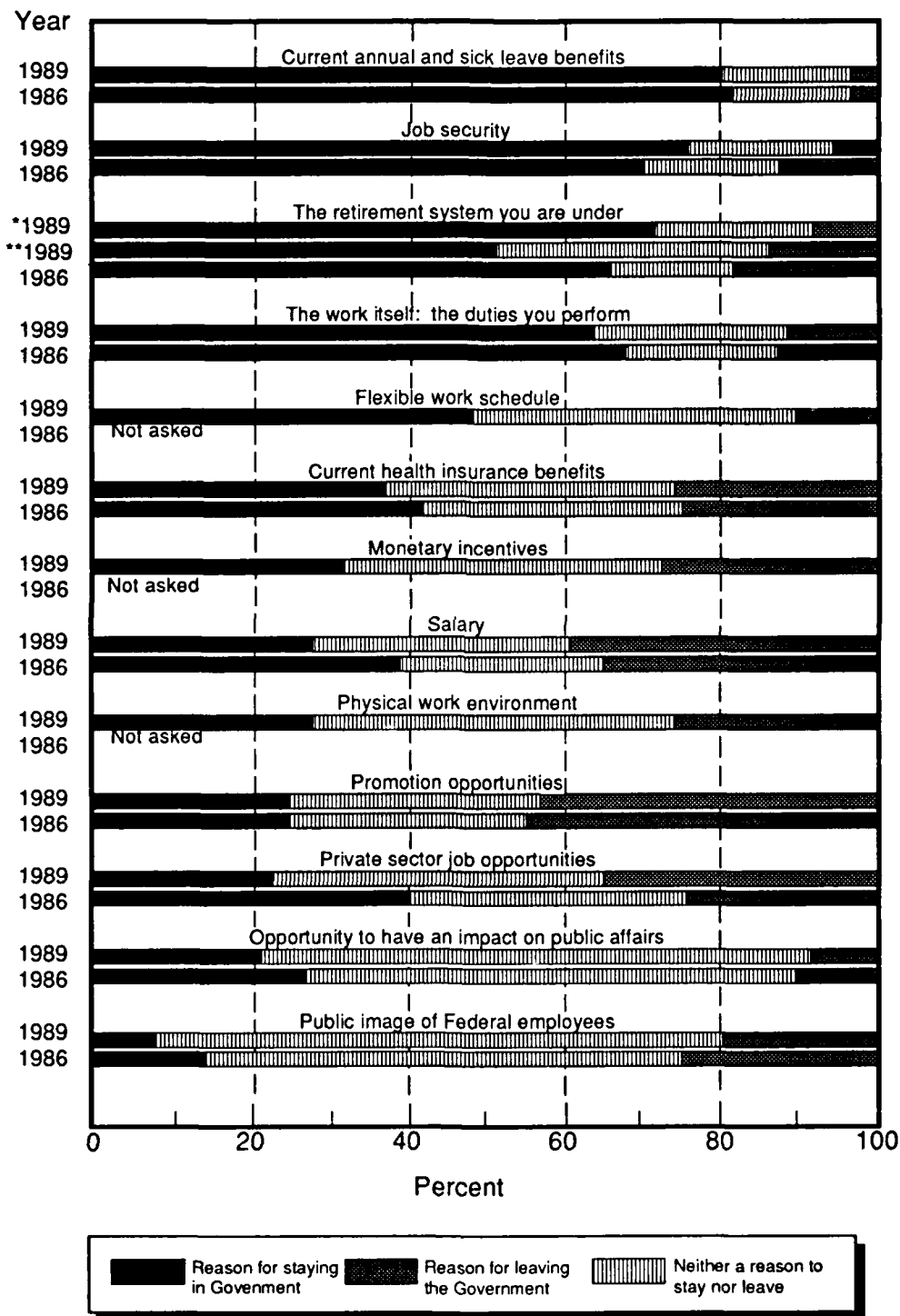
### 2. Pay as a Condition of Employment

*Pay is substantially a dissatisfier among Federal employees, but the level of dissatisfaction is not uniform. Determining pay for various white-collar occupations and grade levels based on geographic location has relatively high support, although the support varies by grade groupings.*

Slightly more than one in every four respondents (28 percent) indicate that they are satisfied with their pay, while three of every five (60 percent) express dissatisfaction with theirs (not a surprising distribution in light of some of the comments quoted earlier). While further analysis of this question shows no differences among other demographic groups, it does show that the level of dissatisfaction is not uniform among various pay systems and grade ranges. This is visible in figure 15.

We asked respondents how they view the idea of a pay system for people in their occupation and grade level that includes consideration of geographic location. This is the key idea behind various Federal white-collar pay reforms currently being proposed or considered, and an idea that appears to be well received in concept. Since Federal blue-collar employees are already under a locality-based pay system, we excluded them in analyzing the responses.

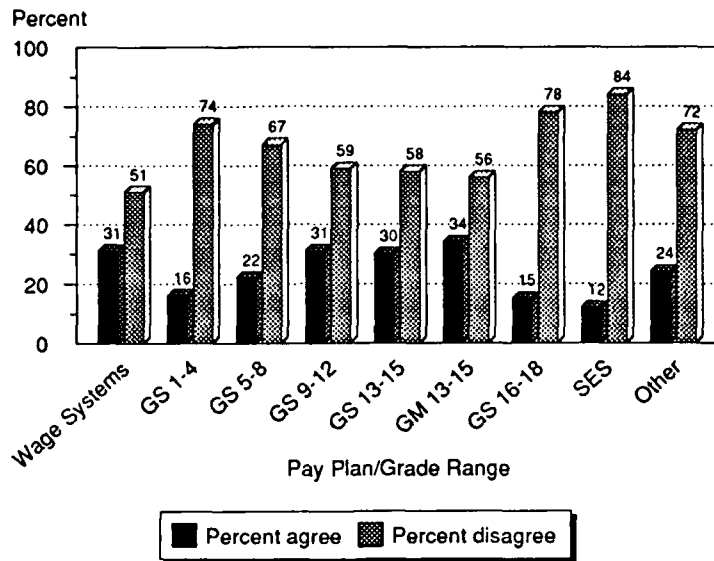
Figure 14. 1989 and 1986 Responses to "How does each of the following affect your decision to stay with or leave the Government?"



\*CSRS (Civil Service Retirement System)  
 \*\*FERS (Federal Employees Retirement System)

# FINDINGS

Figure 15. How Various Groups Responded to "Overall, I am satisfied with my current pay."



NOTE: "Neither agree nor disagree" and "Don't know/Can't judge" responses omitted.

Overall, the distribution of white-collar (including SES and "supergrade" GS 16-18) responses indicates that 58 percent agree that the pay for people in their occupations and at their grade levels should vary according to geographic location, while 30 percent do not agree. We further analyzed the responses by seven broad white-collar grade groups, with the results shown in figure 16. The strong level of agreement among high-grade respondents may be a product of the large proportion of these employees located in relatively high-cost areas.

We also examined the responses by PATCO<sup>11</sup> occupational categories, getting the results shown in figure 17.

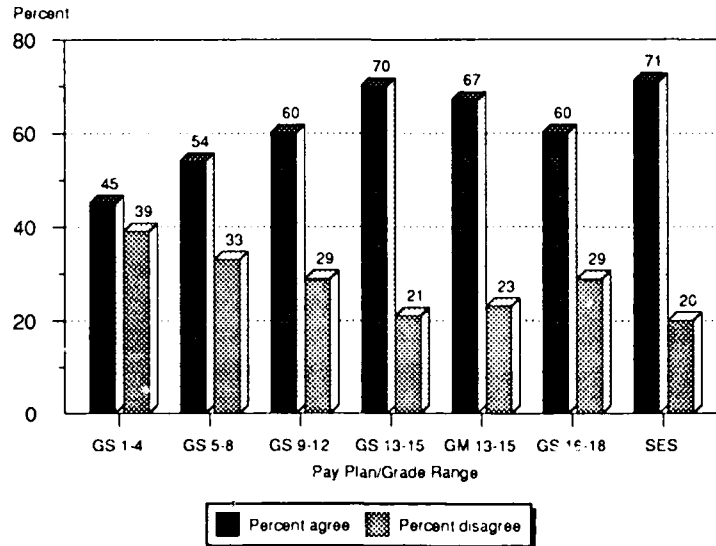
### 3. Fair Treatment

*The sense of fair treatment is generally even among all demographic groups with one exception: age. In general, as the age group rises, the percentage of employees agreeing that they are treated fairly declines.*

Fair treatment of all employees is a major objective for the merit system of the civil service, and a key to employee satisfaction. We asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they believe they are treated fairly with regard to promotions, awards, training, and job assignments. The answers of those who believed they could make a judgment are shown in figure 18.

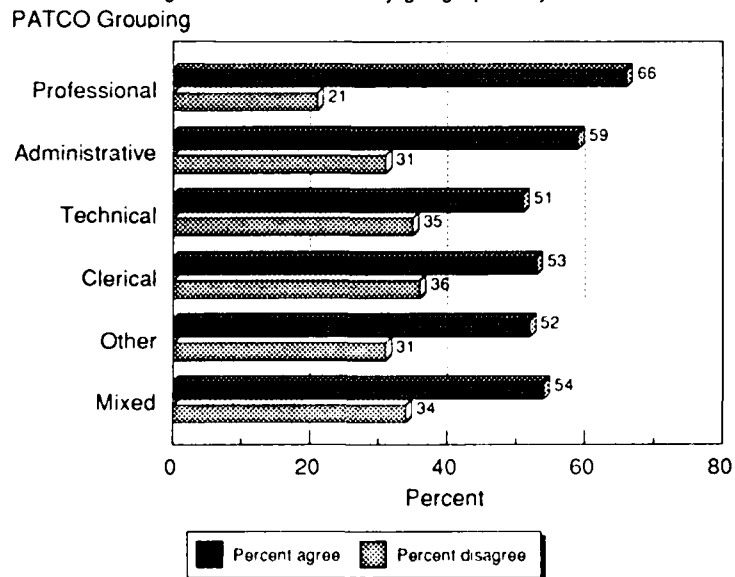
<sup>11</sup> PATCO is a coding system devised by OPM for white-collar occupations. It assigns each white-collar classification series to one of the following five categories: Professional; Administrative; Technical; Clerical; Other. In a small number of instances, a classification series is identified for purposes of this report as "Mixed" because jobs may fit more than one PATCO category depending on grade (e.g., GS-203, which includes both personnel clerk, which is Clerical, and personnel assistant, which is Technical).

Figure 16. White-Collar Employee Responses to "Salaries for people in my occupation and grade level should vary geographically."



NOTE: "Neither agree nor disagree" and "Don't know/Can't judge" responses omitted.

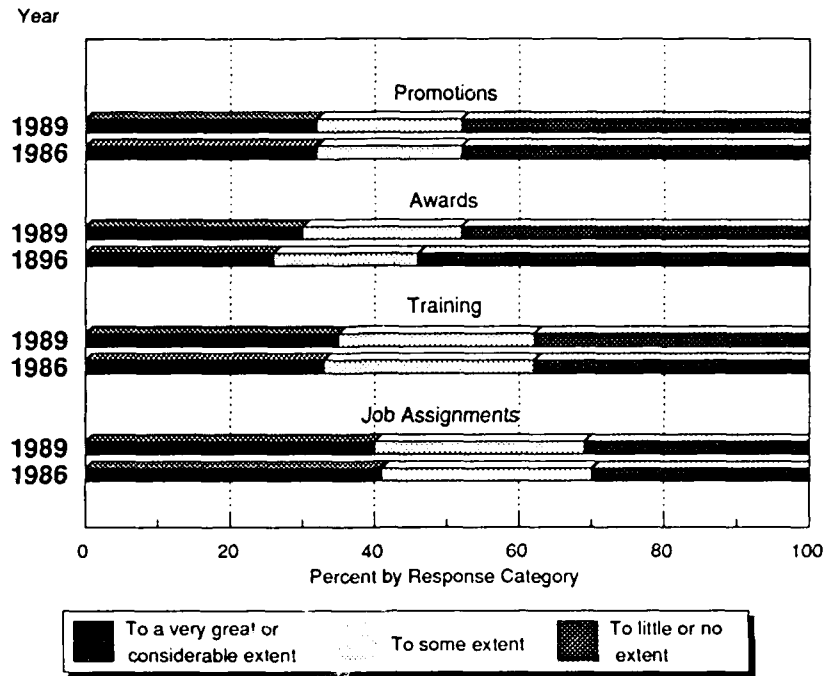
Figure 17. PATCO Responses to "Salaries for people in my occupation and at my grade level should vary geographically."



NOTE: "Neither agree nor disagree" and "Don't know/Can't judge" responses omitted.

# FINDINGS

Figure 18. 1989 and 1986 Responses to "In the past 2 years, to what extent do you believe you have been treated fairly in regard to the following?"



NOTE: "No basis to judge" responses omitted.

Closer analysis reveals no differences in responses from men and women. There are distinctions among age groups for all four questions. With minor exceptions, for each question the percentage of employees responding "to a great or considerable extent" decreases as the age group rises. If Federal agencies will increasingly depend on older employees to accomplish their missions in the coming years (one of the forecasts in "Civil Service 2000"<sup>12</sup>), this possible bias (or perception of bias) against older employees will have to be overcome. Interestingly, concerns about the older worker are not confined to those working for the Federal Government. A report prepared by the U.S. Secretary of Labor stresses the im-

portance of the older worker to the future of the private sector workplace.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. Greater Freedom to Engage in Partisan Political Activity

*Employee interest in greater freedom to engage in partisan political activity is mixed. Approximately equal proportions do and do not want more freedom; a greater percentage expressed no interest either way.*

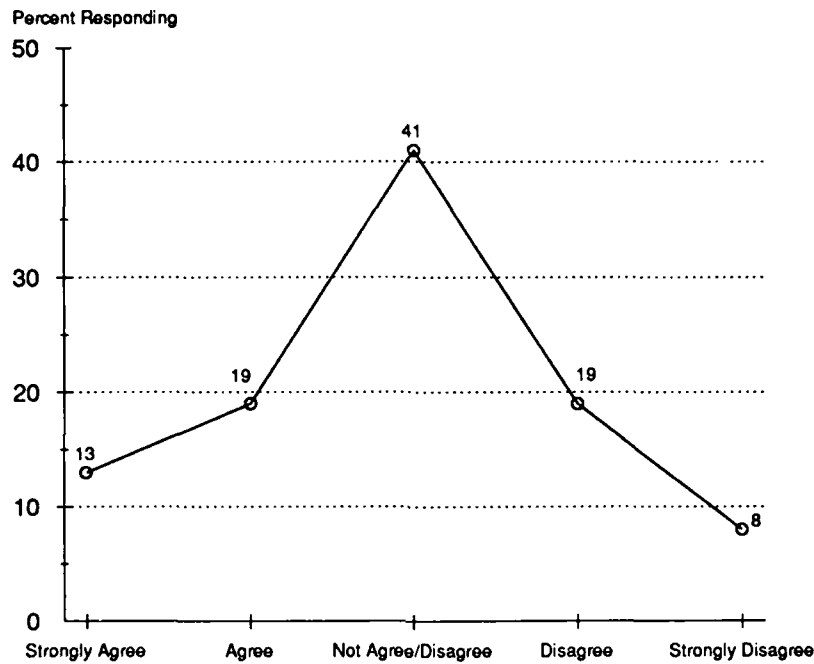
Another issue we explored was the extent to which employees are interested in greater freedom to be more active in partisan political activities. The sur-

<sup>12</sup> The Hudson Institute, op. cit., pp.21-22 and 40-41.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, "Older Worker Task Force: Key Policy Issues for the Future" (Report of the Secretary of Labor), January 1989, especially pp.3, 7, and 9.



Figure 19. Responses to "I would like to be able legally to be more active in partisan political activities."



Note: "Don't know/Can't judge" responses (5% of total) omitted.

vey asked for a response to the statement "I would like to be able legally to be more active in partisan political activities." Revision of the Hatch Act is currently under consideration by Congress, making this a timely question. Organizations and individuals both for and against changes to the Hatch Act have expressed their opinions in testimony during congressional hearings. This survey adds the views of a representative cross section of Federal employees. The results, shown in figure 19, closely resemble a bell curve and suggest that most employees don't hold strong views one way or the other on this issue.

Among survey subgroups, the desire to be more politically active is somewhat stronger among men than women. Little distinction appears among pay plan/grade groupings. The strongest disagreement with this idea is among members of the Senior Executive Service and executives in grades GS 16-18 (half or more of these groups disagree with the statement). These latter respondents are typically in jobs likely to have direct contact with politicians and political executives (some of the responding members

of the SES were themselves political executives), which may color their responses.

### 5. Outside Employment and Post-Employment Restrictions

*Of the respondents making a judgment on the subject, nearly half (45 percent) view outside employment and post-employment restrictions as fair; about one-fourth consider them unfair. The highest expression of unfairness comes from Senior Executives.*

All Federal employees are subject to restrictions on employment outside Government while working for the Government. In addition, they are subject to restrictions on their employment after leaving the Federal Government. Practically speaking, those post-employment restrictions affect many (but probably far less than half) of those who leave Government employment for jobs elsewhere.

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The survey asked for a response to the statement "Current Federal outside employment and post-employment restrictions to assure an ethical Government are fair." Of the respondents expressing an opinion about the fairness of these restrictions, better than two of every five (45 percent) agree that they are fair, while slightly more than one in four (27 percent) consider them unfair.

When this question is examined by pay system and grade grouping, we find that all categories except SES respondents are in an agreement range of 40 to 55 percent, and a disagreement range of 22 to 39 percent. In contrast, only 33 percent of the SES respondents agree, and 54 percent disagree, that the restrictions are fair. Such a difference is understandable, given the greater likelihood of post-employment restrictions affecting higher graded employees.

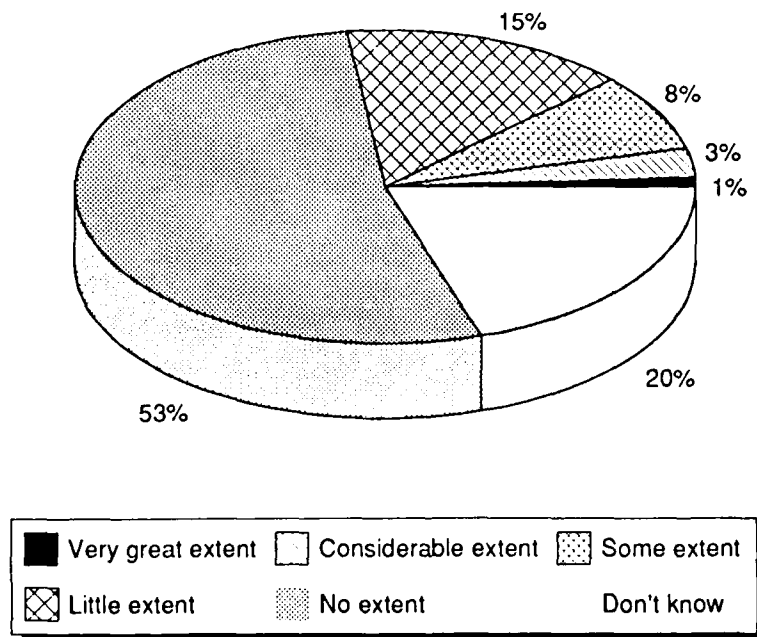
Similarly, analysis by agency shows an agreement range of 35 to 58 percent, and a disagreement range of 18 to 46 percent. These differences may reflect the internal occupational profiles of the various agencies.

## 6. Perceptions of Drug Abuse in the Work Place

*About 12 percent of the respondents perceive a drug abuse problem in their work units "to some extent" or greater. The extent of the perceived problem varies greatly by agency, and the perception is stronger among blue-collar than white-collar employees.*

Another question in our survey addresses a major social issue: drug abuse. We asked respondents to report the extent to which they believe there is a drug abuse problem among employees in their work units. Two caveats are in order before discussing the results. First, the question intentionally did not include the word "alcohol." However, it is highly likely that perceptions of alcohol abuse are included in the results to some degree. We have no way of knowing the extent of this effect. Second, the results do not represent the incidence of drug abuse. Instead, they represent percentages of employees who perceive (or don't perceive) a drug abuse problem to

Figure 20. Responses to "To what extent do you believe there is a drug abuse problem among employees in your work unit?"



varying degrees. It's possible for the responses from several employees in the same organization to draw on a single perceived case of drug abuse.

The drug abuse question produced responses which indicate that at least some individuals perceive a drug abuse problem within their work units. About 12 percent of the respondents said that there is a problem at least "to some extent" in their work groups. Another 15 percent said there was a problem to "a little extent." Two response groups ("to no extent" and "don't know/can't judge") which jointly represent almost 75 percent of the respondents do not perceive a problem. The distribution of responses is shown in figure 20.

For discussion purposes, we will focus on the 12 percent of all respondents who perceive a drug abuse

problem "to some extent" or greater. Interestingly, when examining supervisors' responses we find a slightly higher percentage of second-level supervisors than first-level supervisors who perceived a problem (17 versus 11 percent).

Examination by pay system and grade range discloses a substantial difference between white-collar and blue-collar responses. Within the white-collar grade groups, 12 percent or less of each group see a problem "to some extent" or greater. A substantially higher proportion (22 percent) of blue-collar employees hold this perception.

Finally, when the responses are examined by agency, we find the array shown in table 6.

**Table 6. To what extent do you believe there is a drug abuse problem among employees in your work unit? (Agencies ranked by percentage of respondents answering "to some extent" or greater.)**

Agency	Percent	Agency (continued)	Percent
Navy . . . . .	23	"All Other Agencies" (Smaller agencies combined) . .	9
Other DOD . . . . .	15	Commerce . . . . .	8
Education . . . . .	14	Energy . . . . .	8
General Services Administration . . . . .	14	Environmental Protection Agency . . . . .	8
Interior . . . . .	13	Labor . . . . .	8
Veterans Affairs . . . . .	13	State . . . . .	8
AVERAGE, ALL AGENCIES . . . . .	12	Army . . . . .	7
Health and Human Services . . . . .	11	Office of Personnel Management . . . . .	6
Housing and Urban Development . . . . .	10	Transportation . . . . .	6
Treasury . . . . .	10	Justice . . . . .	5
Agriculture . . . . .	9	National Aeronautics and Space Administration . . . .	5
Air Force . . . . .	9	Small Business Administration . . . . .	5



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## Conclusions

According to our respondents, Federal agencies for the most part are upholding the merit system principles in their day-to-day dealings with their employees. However, nearly one-third of our survey's respondents perceive the intrusion of a "buddy system" into job and job reward decisions. Additionally, about 15 percent report the presence of illegal discrimination in personnel decisions.

The survey reflects a Federal work force that largely supports the concept of basing pay on performance, but which also questions how well that concept has been implemented in their agencies. Most employees reject the idea of replacing the current five-level performance rating system with a "pass/fail" one; the idea has its greatest support among second-level supervisors, although a majority still reject it.

About one-fourth of the respondents believe the amount of work done in their units could be increased without additional staff, and almost one-third believe the quality of their units' work could be improved under the same conditions. Fewer than half of the respondents believe their immediate supervisors have organized the work group effectively to accomplish work, although in many other respects supervisors are viewed favorably by healthy majorities of respondents.

The survey raises some concerns about the future of the Federal work force. While most respondents view their fellow employees as good workers, they tend to see the quality of new hires as lower than the quality of people who have left Government. And there is substantial agreement that the quality of applicants for virtually all jobs has declined over the past 4 years—continuing a pattern found in our 1986 survey.

About one-third of the respondents also report that they are neither receiving training they need to keep pace with changes in their jobs nor being trained in new technology as it is brought into their offices. Most demographic projections suggest that by the year 2000 all employers will find it increasingly difficult to hire people who will bring to the job all of the

skills and knowledge they need. Further, the total labor pool is expected to shrink, leading to increased competition for even marginally prepared job applicants. Those projections also foresee rapid changes in job technology.

On average, Federal employees already are older and better educated than the general U.S. work force. In the coming years, training will take on increased importance in Federal agencies both to prepare new employees to perform their jobs well, and to enable longer term employees to keep up with job changes or to learn new jobs. The survey responses suggest that Federal agencies aren't doing the latter very well right now.

The survey responses indicate that there are some perceptions of drug abuse in the Federal work force, although there is no way from the survey to determine the level of incidence. And finally, the responses tell us that Federal workers are about evenly divided on whether they want more freedom to engage in partisan political activity—and a large proportion are neutral to this idea.

The survey also tells us that Federal employees generally are satisfied with their jobs, believe their work is meaningful, and think their present jobs make good use of their skills and abilities. However, only about half are sufficiently satisfied with the Federal Government as an employer to recommend the Government as a place to work.

Such a logical "disconnect" raises questions that deserve examining by policy makers. Fortunately, comments included in the responses suggest explanations, including perceptions of inadequate pay; concerns about eroding health insurance and retirement benefits; and reaction to an extended period of "bureaucrat bashing." These issues, together with others discussed earlier (e.g., the quality of job applicants and of supervisors; improving productivity; keeping employees current; and drug abuse in the work place) are currently being addressed by the Administration and by Congress. With the excep-

## Conclusions

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tion of "bureaucrat bashing," each is a complex issue not amenable to easy solutions.

We think that findings from this survey offer a good snapshot of the views of Federal employees in late 1989. We believe those views will be valuable to policy makers as they consider changes that will affect

all Federal employees. The decisions reached by those policy makers will have a significant effect on whether some of the findings from this survey—and trends found between 1986 and 1989—continue or are reversed.

# APPENDIX



U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD  
Washington, D.C. 20419

Dear Federal Co-worker:

We need your help with this survey of Federal pay and working conditions. You're part of a relatively small group of Federal employees selected randomly to represent the views of over 2 million Federal employees. Results from this survey will be reported to Congress and the President and made available to the public. **Your answers are important.**

The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) is an independent Federal agency created by Congress in 1978. One of our tasks is to monitor the health of the Federal personnel system. One way we do that is by periodically conducting surveys of the employees in that system. In developing this questionnaire, we received assistance from national Federal employee unions, professional associations, and other interested groups.

This survey gives you an opportunity to share your opinions and experiences concerning your job, your supervisor, your co-workers, performance appraisal, and other subjects. You may complete it at your work site or in the privacy of your own home. Please base your answers on your own experiences and opinions. **We will keep your answers confidential.** Please do not put your name anywhere on this questionnaire.

Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed postage paid envelope within 5 days after you receive it. If you would like a copy of the report(s) published as a result of this survey, you may write to us at the address shown on the next page.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Evangeline W. Swift  
Director, Policy and Evaluation

U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board  
**1989 MERIT PRINCIPLES SURVEY**

# APPENDIX



U. S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20419

## 1989 MERIT PRINCIPLES SURVEY

This survey asks Federal employees to share their opinions and experiences on a variety of personnel issues. The questionnaire is divided into the following four broad sections:

- **Section I**, which applies to all employees. It covers a wide range of areas, including your job; the personnel practices in your work group; issues concerning pay; and individual and organizational performance.
- **Section II**, completed by supervisors, which is concerned with managing people.
- **Section III**, completed by members of the Senior Executive Service, which addresses issues specifically relevant to the SES.
- **Section IV**, completed by all employees, which covers personal and job information.

You may not have to answer every question in this survey. Instructions will tell you what questions to skip. Also, please use the last page of this questionnaire to write any additional responses or comments you may wish to make.

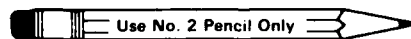
### MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

- DON'T use ink or ballpoint pens.
- Erase completely and cleanly any answer you wish to change.
- Don't make any stray marks in this booklet.

CORRECT MARK:



INCORRECT MARKS:



### PRIVACY ACT NOTICE

Collection of the requested information is authorized by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-454). Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and none of the information you choose to supply will be associated with you individually.

### REPORT REQUEST ADDRESS

If you would like a copy of the reports published as a result of this survey, please address your request to:

U S Merit Systems Protection Board  
Office of Policy and Evaluation  
1120 Vermont Avenue, N W  
Washington, D. C. 20419



**SECTION I: ALL EMPLOYEES**

- Don't know/Can't judge  
 Strongly disagree  
 Disagree  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly agree
- To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
1. The work I do on my job is meaningful to me .....
  2. During the next year, I will actively look for a new Federal Government job outside of this work group .....
  3. During the next year, I will actively look for a new job outside the Federal Government .....
  4. My present job makes good use of my skills and abilities .....
  5. A portion of my pay should be based on how well I perform .....
  6. A portion of my pay, as well as that of my co-workers, should be based on the performance of my entire work group .....
  7. It is important to me to have a voice in decisions which affect my work ....
  8. In general, I am satisfied with my job...
  9. If I had a choice, I would choose to be put under a pay-for-performance system (i.e., salary increases based on my supervisor's judgment of my job performance) .....
  10. Overall, I am satisfied with my current pay .....
  11. I would recommend the Federal Government as a place to work .....
  12. Salaries for people in my occupation and at my grade level should vary according to geographic location rather than being based on a single salary schedule nationwide .....
  13. Current Federal outside employment and post-employment restrictions to assure an ethical Government are fair .....

- Strongly disagree  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly agree
14. My most recent performance rating presented an accurate picture of my actual job performance .....
  15. I understand the performance standards for my job .....
  16. I have the skills I need to do my job...
  17. I would like to be able legally to be more active in partisan political activities .....
18. Please indicate how each of the following affects your decision to stay with or leave the Federal Government.
- No basis to judge  
 Reason for leaving the Government  
 Neither a reason to stay nor leave  
 Reason for staying in Government
- a. Public image of Federal workers .....
  - b. Opportunity to have an impact on public affairs .....
  - c. The work itself, the duties you perform ...
  - d. The retirement system you are under .....
  - e. Current health insurance benefits .....
  - f. Current annual and sick leave benefits ....
  - g. Salary .....
  - h. Promotion opportunities .....
  - i. Job security .....
  - j. Current private sector job opportunities ...
  - k. Flexible work schedule.....
  - l. Monetary incentives to perform well (e.g., cash awards, bonuses, quality step increases) .....
  - m. The physical environment where you work .....

# APPENDIX

19. In the past 2 years, to what extent do you believe you have been treated fairly in regard to the following?

To no extent  
To some extent  
To a very great extent

- a. Promotions .....
- b. Awards .....
- c. Training .....
- d. Job assignments .....

20. To what extent should each of the following be allowed to provide input into your performance appraisal rating?

- a. Yourself .....
- b. Your coworkers .....
- c. Your immediate supervisor .....
- d. Your second-level supervisor .....

21. If the people in your work group stayed the same, to what extent do you think:

- a. the amount of work done in your area could be increased? .....
- b. the quality of work done in your area could be increased? .....

22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning your immediate supervisor?

Don't know/Can't judge  
Strongly disagree  
Disagree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Agree  
Strongly agree

- a. There is effective two-way communication between my immediate supervisor and me .....
- b. My immediate supervisor treats me fairly .....
- c. My immediate supervisor has good technical skills .....
- d. My immediate supervisor has good leadership skills .....
- e. My immediate supervisor encourages me to offer ideas and suggestions to improve productivity and/or quality of work .....
- f. My immediate supervisor has organized our work group effectively to get the work done .....
- g. My immediate supervisor encourages my participation in making decisions affecting my work .....
- h. I have trust and confidence in my immediate supervisor .....

23. Have you received a written performance appraisal in the past 12 months?

- Yes
- No
- No, but have not been in job long enough to be appraised.

24. To what extent were you involved in determining your performance elements and standards?

- To a very great extent
- To a considerable extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- To no extent
- Don't have elements and standards

25. My most recent performance rating was:

- Level 1 (Unacceptable or Unsatisfactory)
- Level 2 (Minimally Successful or Minimally Satisfactory)
- Level 3 (Fully Successful)
- Level 4 (Exceeds Fully Satisfactory or Exceeds Fully Successful)
- Level 5 (Outstanding)
- Have not had a rating

Don't know/Can't judge  
Strongly disagree  
Disagree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Agree  
Strongly agree

26. I would like to see the existing 5-level performance rating system changed to a simple "pass/fail" system .....

27. Through the performance rating system, my supervisor should have greater control over my compensation .....

28. The performance appraisal process should be changed to put a limit on the number of high ratings .....

No basis to judge  
Very unlikely  
Somewhat unlikely  
Neither likely nor unlikely  
Somewhat likely  
Very likely

29. If you perform better in your present job, how likely is it that you will:

- a. Receive more pay (e.g., bonus, promotion, cash award)? .....
- b. Receive nonpay rewards (e.g., letter of recognition)? .....
- c. Receive informal recognition (e.g., being told you do good work)? .....

Poor  
 Average  
 Outstanding

30. Overall, how would you rate the quality of your current coworkers in your immediate work group? .....

31. Overall, how would you rate the quality of people who have joined your immediate work group from outside the Government in the past 4 years (or since you've been in your work group if less than 4 years)? .....

32. Overall, how would you rate the quality of people who have left the Federal Government from your immediate work group in the past 4 years? .....

33. In the past 2 years, have any of the following practices happened to you? Were you: (Mark ONE response for each practice.)

Yes, it happened to me.  
 No, it did not happen to me.

a. Influenced to withdraw from competition for a Federal job in order to help another person's chances for getting a job? .....

b. Denied a job or job reward as a result of another person's selection based on his/her family relationship? .....

c. Denied a job or job reward as a result of another person's selection based on the "buddy system" without regard to merit? .....

d. Denied a job or job reward based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, handicapping condition or marital status? .....

e. Pressured to resign or transfer on account of political affiliation? .....

f. Denied a job or job reward as a result of political affiliation? .....

g. Asked by someone of authority over you to provide a political contribution or service? .....

h. Been subject to reprisal for making a "whistleblower" disclosure? .....

34. To what extent do you believe there is a drug abuse problem among employees in your work unit?

To a very great extent       To a little extent  
 To a considerable extent       To no extent  
 To some extent       Don't know/Can't judge

35. Have you changed jobs in the past 3 years (e.g., transfer, reassignment, promotion)?

Yes       No

Not applicable/Can't judge  
 Strongly disagree  
 Disagree  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly agree

36. The nature of the work I perform has changed substantially over the past 3 years .....

37. I have received the training I needed to keep pace with my job as it has changed .....

38. I am being trained on new technology as it is brought into my office .....

39. Are you a:

Nonsupervisor? — Skip to question 44 on page 6.  
 First-level supervisor (i.e., do you sign performance appraisals for other employees?)  
 Second- or higher-level supervisor?

**SECTION II: SUPERVISORS**

40. In the past 4 years, has the quality of applicants for vacancies in your work group improved or worsened? (Mark ONE response for each type of position vacancy.)

No basis to judge  
 Greatly worsened  
 Somewhat worsened  
 Remained the same  
 Somewhat improved  
 Greatly improved

**Position Vacancies**

- a. Wage Grade (trades and crafts) .....
- b. GS 1 through 5 clerical or secretarial...
- c. GS 6 and above clerical or secretarial...
- d. GS 1 through 5 technical (e.g., engineering, biological or medical technician or aide).....
- e. GS 6 and above technical .....
- f. GS 5 through 7 entry-level professional or administrative .....
- g. GS 9 through 12 mid-level professional or administrative .....
- h. GS or GM 13 through 15 senior-level professional or administrative...
- i. SES or GS 16 through 18.....
- j. Other.....

# APPENDIX

41. During the past 2 years have you supervised employees with poor performance or misconduct problems?
- Yes, poor performance     No  
 Yes, misconduct             Not sure } Skip to question 44.  
 Yes, poor performance and misconduct

Please continue with Item 42.

42. Which of these problems did you have to deal with most recently?
- Poor performance  
 Misconduct  
 Mixed (both)

Please continue with Item 43A.

- 43A. For the problem referred to in question 42, what did you do?

(Mark the oval in this column after each action you took.)

**ACTION TAKEN**

- a. I counseled the employee and worked with him/her informally  
b. I referred the employee to a counseling service provided by my agency  
c. I gave the employee a less than satisfactory performance rating  
d. I placed the employee on a Performance Improvement Plan  
e. I initiated formal action against him/her  
f. I took no action  
g. I have not decided yet what to do

I took this action

MARK HERE THE EFFECT OF YOUR ACTION ON THE EMPLOYEE'S PERFORMANCE OR CONDUCT

Made Things Worse      Made No Difference      Made Things Better      No Basis To Judge

.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Did you remember to answer 43B?

44. Are you a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES)?
- Yes     No — Skip to question 53 on page 7.

**SECTION III: SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE**

45. Were you converted into the SES in 1979 when the SES first started (i.e., are you a charter member)?
- Yes     No

46. How long have you been in the SES?

- Less than 1 year  
 1 to less than 2 years  
 2 to less than 5 years  
 5 years or more

47. Which type of SES appointment do you have?

- Career                                     Limited  
 Noncareer

48. Which of the following best describes your immediate supervisor?

- Political executive                     Military officer  
 Career executive                       Other

49. Do you supervise SES employees?

- Yes     No

50. Have you received an SES performance or rank award within the past 2 years?

- Yes     No

51. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the SES?  
(Mark ONE response for each statement.)

No basis to judge  
Strongly disagree  
Disagree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Agree  
Strongly agree

**Statement**

- a. The bonus/rank award system is a strong incentive for me to do my best .....
- b. There are enough bonuses so that if I perform well I have a good chance of receiving one .....
- c. Scientists and technical experts should not be part of the current SES system, but rather should have their own comparable system ...
- d. The SES performance appraisal process has improved organizational effectiveness .....

52. The objectives for the SES listed below are taken directly from the law. How successful is your agency in meeting these objectives?

Don't know/Can't judge  
 Completely unsuccessful  
 Somewhat unsuccessful  
 Neither successful nor unsuccessful  
 Somewhat successful  
 Completely successful

- a. Basing compensation, retention and tenure on executive success measured in terms of individual and organizational performance .....
- b. Assuring that senior executives are accountable and responsible for the effectiveness and productivity of employees under them .....
- c. Recognizing exceptional accomplishment .....
- d. Enabling the head of an agency to reassign senior executives to best accomplish the agency's mission ....
- e. Providing severance pay, early retirement, and placement assistance for senior executives who are removed from the SES for nondisciplinary reasons .....
- f. Protecting senior executives from arbitrary or capricious actions .....
- g. Providing for program continuity and policy advocacy in the management of public programs ....
- h. Ensuring accountability for honest, economical and efficient Government .....
- i. Providing for the initial and continuing systematic development of highly competent senior executives .....
- j. Providing for an executive system which is guided by the public interest and free from improper political interference .....
- k. Providing a compensation system designed to attract and retain highly competent senior executives .....
- l. Maintaining a merit personnel system free of prohibited personnel practices .....
- m. Ensuring compliance with all applicable civil service rules and regulations, including those related to equal employment opportunity, political activity and conflicts of interest .....
- n. Appointing career executives to fill SES positions to the extent practicable, consistent with the effective and efficient implementation of agency policy and responsibilities ...

**SECTION IV: PERSONAL AND JOB INFORMATION (ALL EMPLOYEES)**

53. How many years have you been a Federal Government employee (excluding military service)?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 through 5 years
- 6 through 10 years
- 11 through 15 years
- 16 through 20 years
- 21 through 25 years
- 26 through 30 years
- 31 years or more

54. Do you work at headquarters or in the field?

- Headquarters
- Field location (e.g., regional office, field office, state office)

55. How many years of full-time employment have you had outside of the Federal Government within the past 5 years?

- None
- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-5 years

56. Are you:

- Male
- Female

57. What is your age?

- Under 20
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60-64
- 65 or older

58. What is your highest education level? (Mark only ONE)

- Less than high school diploma
- High school diploma or GED
- High school diploma or GED plus some college or technical training
- 2-year college degree (AA, AS)
- 4-year college degree (BA, BS, or other bachelors degree)
- Some graduate school
- Graduate or professional degree

59. What is your pay category?

- General schedule or similar (GS, GG, GW)
- GM
- Wage system (WG, WS, WL, WD, WN)
- Executive (ST, EX, SES) or equivalent
- Other

60. What is your current pay grade?

- 1-4
- 5-8
- 9-12
- 13-14
- 15
- 16-18
- ES-1, ES-2, ES-3, ES-4 (SES only)
- ES-5, ES-6 (SES only)
- Other

# APPENDIX

**61. To which retirement system do you belong?**

- Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)
- Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS)

**62. Where do you work?**

- Agriculture
- Commerce
- Defense:**
  - Air Force
  - Army
  - Navy
  - Other DoD
- Education
- Energy
- Environmental Protection Agency
- General Services Administration
- Health and Human Services
- Housing and Urban Development
- Interior
- Justice
- Labor
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- Office of Personnel Management
- Small Business Administration
- State
- Transportation
- Treasury
- Veterans Affairs
- Other

Please continue with Item 63.

**63. What is your job classification series (e.g., 334 for computer specialists, 318 for secretaries, 810 for civil engineers, or 610 for nurses)? Please indicate your job classification series below, placing 0's in front of the number, if necessary, to make it four digits long. For example, if you are a computer specialist with the job classification series number 334, you would mark it as follows:**

**Example**

0	3	3	4
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○

**Your job series classification number**

○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
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○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○

Write the numbers in the boxes. →

Then, darken the matching ovals. →

## COMMENTS

Please briefly describe why you would or would not want to be under a pay-for-performance system.

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Other comments (Please use the space below for any other comments you may wish to offer about Federal personnel issues. Attach additional pages if you need more space.)

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**This completes the survey. Please use the enclosed postage-paid envelope to return the survey. If a postage-paid envelope is not provided, please return to MSPB Survey Processing Center, Questar Data Systems, Inc., 2905 West Service Road, Eagan, MN 55121. Thank you for your cooperation.**