Building an Engaging Workplace

Understanding and Using Engagement Drivers

Introduction

This summary document has been produced as a companion to the infographic, *Building an Engaging Workplace*. The infographic introduces drivers for the Employee Engagement Index assessed through the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). The purpose of this summary is to provide background and explanatory details to supplement the information shown in the infographic.

The FEVS contains questions that capture employees' perceptions of workplace conditions that contribute to employee engagement, and perceptions on questions about practices, policies, behaviors and attitudes that support these workplace conditions. The goal of the driver analysis is to identify workplace characteristics with the greatest potential to influence engagement conditions in agencies. Leveraged as part of strategic action, drivers can be a powerful tool for agency improvement initiatives.

A number of topics are covered in this summary, and these include:
- a brief introduction to engagement, its definition, and how workplace conditions for engaging employees are defined through the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey;
- an example benefit of employee engagement: employee retention;
- definition of drivers and an outline of drivers for the FEVS Employee Engagement Index and subfactors; and
- an overview of agency promising practices to illustrate how key drivers can suggest change actions to support efforts to positively influence employee engagement.

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Employee Engagement

Engagement is defined as: *An employee's sense of purpose that is evident in their display of dedication, persistence and effort in their work or overall attachment to their organization and its mission*. (U.S. Office of Personnel Management)

The Employee Engagement Index (EEI) developed in 2010, uses questions from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) to measure conditions that can lead to engagement. This index provides an assessment of the engagement potential of a work environment and is comprised of three subfactors: Leaders Lead, Supervisors, and Intrinsic Work Experience. Each subfactor reflects a different aspect of an engaging work environment and each is assessed through questions on the FEVS.

- **Leaders Lead** reflects employee perceptions of the integrity of leadership, as well as leadership behaviors such as communication and workforce motivation.
- **Supervisor** describes the interpersonal relationship between employee and supervisor, including trust, respect, and support.
- **Intrinsic Work Experience** captures employee feelings of motivation and competency relating to their role in the workplace.

Figure 1: Subfactors for the Employee Engagement Index
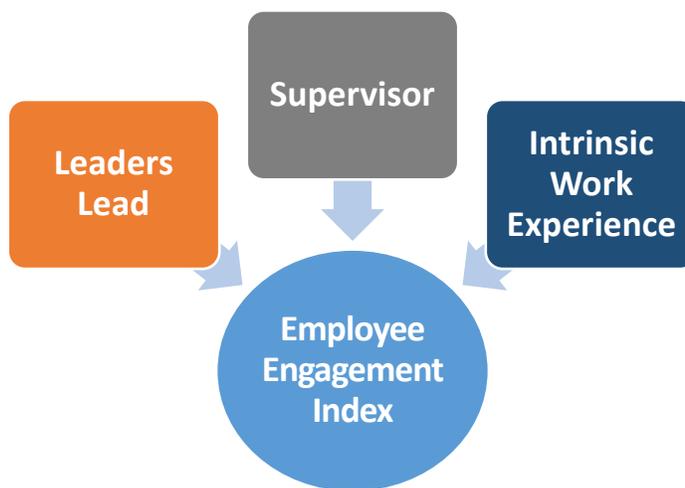
Why Focus on Employee Engagement?

A successful agency fosters conditions essential to an engaged workforce to ensure each employee can reach his or her potential and contribute to the success of the agency. Research shows a relationship between employee engagement and performance; analysis of FEVS data show similar results. As just one example, study shows that 2015 EEI scores are lower for employees who are considering leaving their organizations than for employees who intend to stay. This finding provides evidence to support the assumed link between retention and engagement. Given the potential for negative costs with employee turnover, demonstration of

this link has important performance consequences for agencies. Costs can be direct, in terms of the actual monetary cost of replacing an employee, and indirect as a result of lost technical and/or organizational knowledge.

Figure 2: Employee Engagement Score by Stated Intent to Remain With or Leave an Agency
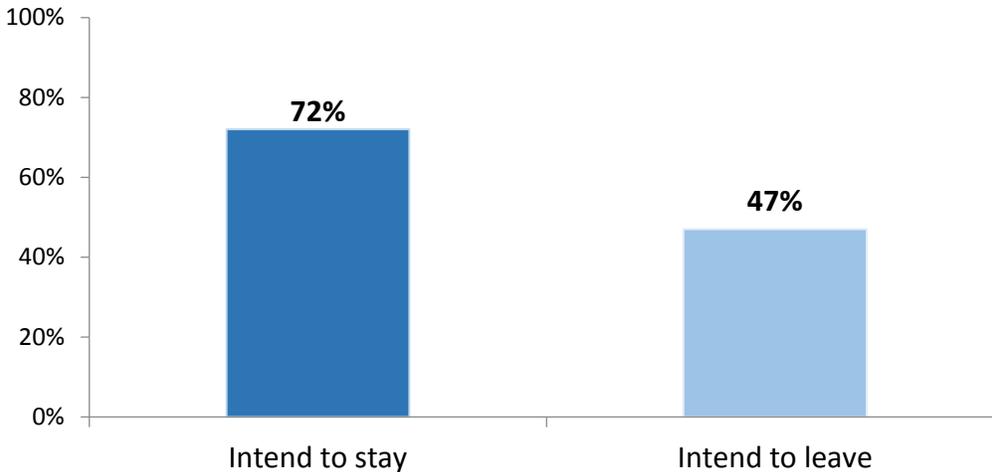
Drivers Indicate Actions for Supporting Employee Engagement

Review of research shows a number of possible drivers of engagement. Many relate in some way to overall effective practices, including those around performance management (e.g., support of employee development, performance feedback). Assessment of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey showed that a number of survey questions aligned well with topics suggested by prior research as important to engagement. Analysis of FEVS data identified several factors or drivers among survey questions that support conditions for achieving an engaged workforce. The analyses identified five drivers consisting of FEVS questions that are related to the EEI overall. These drivers, leveraged appropriately, can indicate direction and options for effective change. The figure shows drivers in the order of the strength of their relationship with the EEI overall for the Federal government.

Figure 3: Drivers for the Employee Engagement Index (EEI)

Employee Engagement Index Drivers

- Performance Feedback
- Collaborative Management
- Merit System Principles
- Employee Training and Development
- Work/Life Balance

Identified drivers relate in unique ways to the leader, supervisor, and employee behaviors and attitudes characteristic of an environment supportive of engagement. Addressing these shared perceptions can have a positive influence on workplace conditions and support targeted change efforts.

Shown in figure 4, additional unique drivers emerged when the *subfactors* for EEI were assessed. Subfactors include Leaders Lead, Supervisor, and Intrinsic Work Experience. In addition to Collaborative Management, Merit System Principles, and other drivers for EEI overall, subfactor drivers include: Performance Recognition and Reward, Job Resources, and Performance Rating.

Figure 4: Drivers for EEI Subfactors
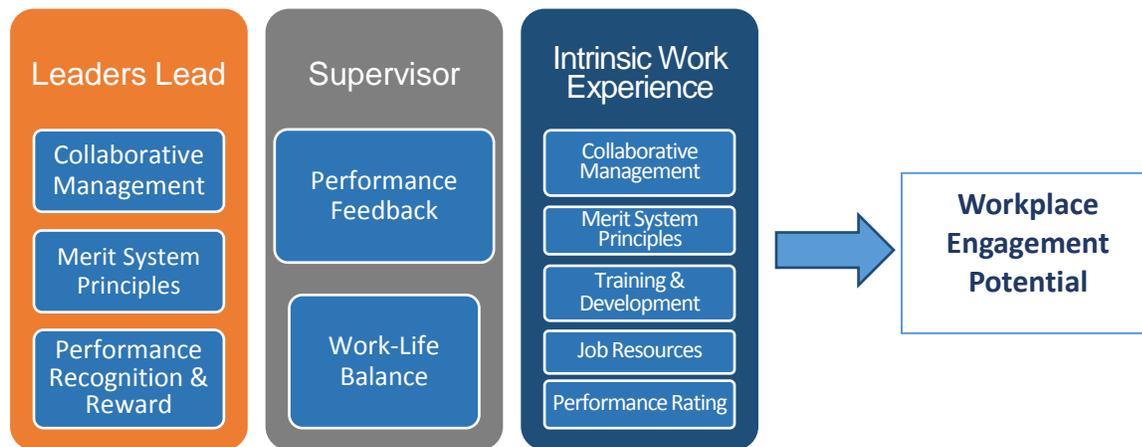
Examining the survey questions that make up the drivers indicate areas that can be targeted to help improve engagement. For example, questions included under Job Resources, a key driver of the Intrinsic Work Experience subfactor, include providing enough information and resources to do a job well, and reasonable workloads (for question wording, see tabled information below). Review of questions that make up drivers suggest actions agency leaders may take to improve conditions captured under the subfactor Intrinsic Work Experience. Keep in mind that EEI and subfactor drivers were developed to represent Federal government agencies combined and the importance of drivers for each individual agency may change slightly in final FEVS reports.

A complete list of EEI and subfactor driver definitions and the survey questions that make up the drivers are tabled next. Questions numbers are taken from the 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. The table shows which measures relate to the drivers, specifying the Employee Engagement Index (EEI) and/or subfactors, Leaders Lead, Supervisor, and Intrinsic Work Satisfaction. Recall that some drivers are unique to individual subfactors.

Table: Definitions and Survey Items of Drivers for EEI and Subfactors

Driver and Definition	Survey Questions Included in Driver	Driver for…
Performance Feedback Emphasizes the need for ongoing employee feedback to support and sustain progress toward achieving work goals.	▪ Discussions with my supervisor about my performance are worthwhile. (Q44) ▪ My supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my job performance. (Q46) ▪ In the last six months, my supervisor has talked with me about my performance. (Q50)	▪ Employee Engagement Index (EEI) ▪ Supervisor
Training and Development Focuses on the need to increase employee capacity to perform, e.g., by providing training opportunities. Development encourages and strengthens good performance.	▪ I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization. (Q1) ▪ My training needs are assessed. (Q18)	▪ EEI ▪ Intrinsic Work Experience
Performance Rating Emphasizes the role of evaluating employee performance to achieve results.	▪ My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance. (Q15) ▪ I am held accountable for achieving results. (Q16) ▪ In my most recent performance appraisal, I understood what I had to do to be rated at the next performance level (for example, Fully Successful, Outstanding). (Q19)	▪ Intrinsic Work Experience
Performance Recognition and Reward Outlines the importance of providing incentives to, and recognition of, employees for their performance, and acknowledging employee contributions to the agency's mission.	▪ Promotions in my work unit are based on merit. (Q22) ▪ In my work unit, steps are taken to deal with a poor performer who cannot or will not improve. (Q23) ▪ In my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way. (Q24) ▪ Awards in my work unit depend on how well employees perform their jobs. (Q25)	▪ Leaders Lead
Collaborative Management Illustrates the importance of a management style that promotes and supports collaborative communication and teamwork in completing projects and accomplishing goals/objectives.	▪ Managers promote communication among different work units (e.g., about projects, goals, needed resources). (Q58) ▪ Managers support collaboration across work units to accomplish work objectives. (Q59)	▪ EEI ▪ Leaders Lead ▪ Intrinsic Work Experience

Driver and Definition	Survey Questions Included in Driver	Driver for…
Job Resources Emphasizes the importance of removing barriers to engagement, including providing the resources, information, and workload to enable employees to engage in persistent and dedicated effort at work.	▪ I have enough information to do my job well (Q2). ▪ I have sufficient resources (for example, people, materials, budget) to get my job done. (Q9) ▪ My workload is reasonable. (Q10)	▪ Intrinsic Work Experience
Work/Life balance Highlights the importance of supervisor support of employees needs to balance work and non-work priorities.	▪ My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues. (Q 42)	▪ EEI ▪ Supervisor
Merit System Principles Serves to ensure that Federal personnel management practices support fairness and protect employees from arbitrary actions, personnel favoritism, political coercion and reprisal.	▪ I can disclose a suspected violation of any law, rule or regulation without fear of reprisal. (Q17) ▪ Arbitrary action, personal favoritism and coercion for partisan political purposes are not tolerated. (Q37) ▪ Prohibited Personnel practices (for example, illegally discriminating for or against any employee/applicant, obstructing a person's right to compete for employment, knowingly violating veterans' preference requirements) are not tolerated. (Q38)	▪ EEI ▪ Leaders Lead ▪ Intrinsic Work Experience

Promising Agency Practices

The research behind the identification of engagement drivers was completed at the conclusion of the 2015 FEVS data collection. Accordingly, the resulting framework of drivers has not been fully utilized by any agency. However, promising practices emerged from an Employee Engagement Senior Accountable Official Workshop held on May 18, 2015 and these practices show alignment with the framework. Practices shared by the Department of Education, provide examples corresponding to several drivers and serve as tangible examples of how key drivers can provide strategic leverage points to support agency efforts to positively influence employee engagement.

Performance Recognition and Reward:
▪ Host Secretary's Awards Ceremony annually to recognize the outstanding achievements of individuals and groups
▪ Offer a variety of award types (monetary and non-monetary) to recognize employee achievements

- Budget for awards and recognition
- Take time to recognize and personally thank those who are providing excellent service and/or going above the call of duty
- Recognize the contributions of employees in meaningful ways

Performance Management:
- Ensure agreement among leadership team on goals and objectives
- Ensure all employees are aware of and understand goals and objectives
- Ensure that appropriate dashboards are developed and used to track performance on a regular (weekly/monthly) basis
- Encourage executives, managers, and supervisors to mentor employees
- Ensure meaningful distinctions are made between high and low performance, and incentives are provided for exemplary performance
- Provide feedback on assignments and deliverables as completed

Employee Development:
- Assess and fund training requirements
- Support opportunities for growth and development
- Allow opportunities for cross-training and stretch assignments

Conclusion

Analysis of governmentwide FEVS data demonstrates that a number of survey questions are positively related to the conditions supportive of employee engagement. Because of this relationship, agencies can take action to address topics captured in the drivers and influence the potential of workplaces to support employee engagement. Leveraged as part of an action strategy, drivers provide a powerful tool for improving and sustaining engagement and, ultimately, performance of the Federal workforce.