

Effectuating Feedback from Organizational Surveys: The Federal Employee Viewpoint
Survey

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Abstract

As the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey has gained prominence as a tool for gauging and promoting employee engagement, attention has increasingly been directed at the items included in the survey instrument itself. In collaboration with the regional office of a federal agency, we sought insight into how employees interpret ambiguous terms such as “my organization” and “senior leaders” in the context of the survey. The results reveal that employees place a wide range of different interpretations on such terms thus limiting the usability of the FEVS results by agencies.

Effectuating the Results of Organizational Surveys: The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

Employee surveys have been promoted as vehicles that can facilitate an understanding of work-related attitudes and thereby inform managerial interventions designed to enhance employee job satisfaction and “engagement.” Implicit in the formulation is that improved engagement is a means of achieving higher levels of organizational performance.

Over the past fifteen years, the federal government has assessed the work-related attitudes of its employees. The initiative began in 2002 when the Office of Personnel Management sponsored the first Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS). The FHCS was administered on a biennial basis through 2010 at which time it was retitled the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). From 2010 through the present the FEVS has been administered annually.

Over time, the FEVS results have garnered increased attention both within and external to the executive branch. The Obama administration in particular relied on the FEVS results as a gauge of employee engagement with an increased level of engagement a top management priority. Fernandez et al. (2015) document the expansive use of FEVS data within the academy citing 42 articles between the years of 2000 and 2013 in which FEVS data was employed.

Interest in the FEVS data in turn has resulted in increased attention to the FEVS instrument itself. Fernandez et al. (2015, p. 387) offer a, “critical assessment” of the FEVS highlighting, “weaknesses in the content, design, and implementation...” (p. 382). Among their criticisms is that the FEVS lacks, “a central focus or guiding research question” (p. 388). They are critical of questions that combine constructs such as motivation and commitment which should appropriately be assessed separately such as, “In my organization, leaders generate high

levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.” Recommendations offered by Fernandez et al. include the following;

- To, “expand the list of topics and concepts measured in the survey” (p. 389) by including, for example, leadership and change management.
- To, “select a subsample of federal employees and track them over time to create a panel” (p. 389) as a means of making it possible to draw causal inferences from the data, and
- To construct survey items in ways to, “reduce mono-method bias and to enhance accuracy of measurement” (p. 389).

Omitted from Fernandez et al.’s (2015) discussion however, is any reference to a problem that holds particular significance for those holding managerial positions in federal agencies charged with acting on the FEVS results. The problem is that a number of the terms employed are so ambiguous as to inhibit investigation and intervention of the type the FEVS is intended to provoke.

The problem of ambiguous FEVS terminology surfaced in the context of discussions held with managerial personnel at the partner organization, the regional office of a federal agency. The broad purpose of the partnership is to identify means of enhancing employee work motivation for which purpose the FEVS is an important tool. In reviewing the FEVS data, managerial personnel in the agency expressed frustration with items in the FEVS that employ broad terms such as, “my organization,” “leaders,” and “managers.” The problem that arises is that when the office as a whole or a particular unit within the office receives low scores on an item that includes a term such as, “my organization,” there is no way of knowing, 1) how the employees interpret this term, whether they interpret it as referring to the agency as a whole, the

regional office, their division, their branch or their immediate work group, and 2) the level or unit at which remedial action should be targeted. Similarly, if there is a high level of disagreement with the statement, “In my organization, leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce,” management cannot be sure how employees are interpreting the term, “leaders.” In an organization with five distinct levels as depicted in Figure 1, do employees interpret “leaders” to mean those at agency headquarters? The regional administrator and the deputy regional administrator? The division head? Or possibly even someone lower in the chain of command. Figure 2 lists the terms that are at issue along with FEVS items that employ these terms.

Figures 1 & 2 here

In order to better understand the nature and extent of the problem, a survey was administered to regional office personnel. The survey items (included as Appendix A) were designed to probe the employees’ interpretations of terms such as those listed above. The findings, discussed below, reveal, 1) that employees place very different interpretations on these terms, and 2) that those interpretations are a function of factors such as the unit or office to which the employee is assigned and the nature of the employee’s work. As a means of further probing employee interpretations and understandings, a series of interviews were conducted with personnel at different levels of the organization. The results of the interviews substantially validated the apprehensions expressed by managerial personnel in interpreting and acting on the FEVS data. Overall, the study’s findings suggest that if the FEVS is to continue to serve as a mechanism to improvements in the federal workplace, attention needs to be directed at the wording of a number of the FEVS items

In the following section, we present a brief review of the genesis of “employee attitude”

surveys including the different uses to which they have been put. Some background on the FEVS is followed by a presentation of the specific findings from our investigation.

Organizational Assessment and Survey Feedback Action

The use of surveys to assess employee attitudes on matters of organizational importance became popular in the private sector in the postwar era (Kraut 1996). Initially, such surveys were designed to obtain data that could be used in the design of human resource management-related policies such as those relating to compensation and appraisal (Nadler, 1996). Over time however, there was recognition that such surveys could serve strategic purposes, for example to drive change in the behaviors and attitudes of front-line employee (Nadler 1996).

Within the organization development profession the term, “survey feedback action” became associated with a specific approach whereby employee attitude surveys were used to drive organizational improvement. Burke (2006, p. 133) describes the survey feedback action process as follows,

...first, the survey data collection by questionnaire to determine employees' perceptions of a variety of facilitators, most focusing on the management of the organization; and second, the feedback—results of the survey reported back systematically in summary form to all people who answered the questionnaire.

Burke describes a process whereby the feedback occurs, “in phases, starting with the top team of the organization and flowing downward according to the formal hierarchy and within functional units or teams” (p. 133). The intent is to provide managers and their subordinates at each level with, “general feedback concerning the overall organization and specific feedback regarding its particular group” (p. 133). Groups at each level then, “jointly plan action steps for improvement” (p. 133).

The “feedback” element is of particular interest here in light of the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) intent that the FEVS results serve as prompt for managerial action. In the, “Annual Employee Survey Guidance” posted on the FEVS website, OPM comments that, the “AES” (Annual Employee Survey), “provides information that allows organizations to focus their efforts and to improve various programs and processes” (OPM, 2008, p. 18). OPM comments further, “Action plans should be developed at multiple levels, agencywide, by subcomponent, and even several levels down in the agency” (OPM, 2008, p. 18).

The FEVS gained a high level of visibility during the Obama administration as a consequence of the priority placed on improving employee “engagement.” In his FY 2017 budget message to Congress, President Obama stated that improving the engagement of federal employees as measured via the FEVS Employee Engagement Index (EEI), “is a top priority of the President’s Management Agenda....” (OMB, 2016, p. 83).¹ The administration established an objective of increasing employee engagement—as measured by the EEI—from 63 percent to 67 percent.

The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

The requirement for an annual survey of executive branch employees was mandated by Congress as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 (NDAA). In the law Congress directed that the survey focus on;

1. “Leadership and management practices that contribute to agency performance; and
2. “Employee satisfaction with, a) leadership policies and practices, b) work environment, c) rewards and recognition for professional accomplishment and personal contributions to achieving organizational mission, d) opportunity for professional development and growth; and e) opportunity to contribute to achieving

organizational mission.” (Personnel Management in Agencies - Employee Surveys, 2006, p. 49979).

Although the law directed that each agency conduct its own survey, the law further directed OPM to, “issue regulations prescribing survey questions that should appear on all agency surveys” (Personnel Management in Agencies - Employee Surveys, 2006, p. 49979). A final regulation published in August, 2006, included a list forty-five questions that OPM deemed consistent with the areas of interest identified by Congress that were to be included in each agency’s survey instrument. OPM further specified that, “Agencies participating in the FHCS will satisfy the annual survey requirement for any year in which the FHCS is conducted if all major components are represented in the FHCS” (Personnel Management in Agencies - Employee Surveys, 2006, p. 49979). During the period 2002 – 2010 when OPM administered the FHCS every even-numbered year, agencies were left to their own devices to fulfill the survey requirement for the odd-numbered years. When, in 2011, OPM began administering the FHCS/FEVS annually, it became the de facto vehicle for meeting the NDAA requirement for the majority of agencies.

In apparent recognition of a need to clarify some of the terms employed in the designated questions, the rule included “definitions” of “key terms,” listed here in Figure 3. Employees and/or agencies with questions or concerns about terms used in the FEVS are directed to these definitions. Apparent from Figure 3 however, is that these are of limited assistance in interpreting the questions posed. For example, that, “Organization means an agency, office, or division” does not help the employee attempting to discern whether, in responding to the question, “In my organization, leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce,” the appropriate referent is the agency, the region, the division, the branch or the

section. No definition is provided for the term “senior leaders.”

Figure 3 here

Findings - Survey

In the fall of 2016 a survey was sent electronically to all 1,070 regional office employees below the level of division head. Questions designed to probe issues relating to the FEVS were one part of a larger survey intended to probe other work motivation-related issues. The questions, listed in Appendix A, focused in particular on the terms, “my (your) organization,” “managers, and “leaders.” We worked closely with the regional office to boost response rates. Information was placed on the office’s intranet, signs with information on the study were posted in the building, and we sent several reminder emails to the employees. Overall, we collected 567 responses for a rate of 53%.

“My/Your Organization”

For the purpose of understanding how employees interpret the term, “my organization” as employed in the FEVS, we first replicated the following FEVS question: “I recommend my organization as a good place to work.” Those results are shown in Figure 4. We then asked a series of specific questions;

- I recommend Agency X as a good place to work
- I recommend Region Y as a good place to work
- I recommend my Division/Office as a good place to work
- I recommend my Branch/Office as a good place to work

The results of this set of questions are shown in Figure 5. Figure 5 reveals a discrepancy in the attitudes of employees with regard to the different organizational levels. In particular, the chart shows that employees are more negatively disposed toward the most proximate unit, the branch

than toward the larger units of which the branch is part. In the absence of data from the more specific formulation and forced to act on the basis of the results from the generic question the office would act absent the knowledge that, to the extent there is a problem, the problem is at the lowest organizational level.

Figures 4 & 5 here

A similar approach was taken with regard to the FEVS item, “Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization?” First, the question was posed as in the FEVS (see Figure 6) and subsequently the question was posed in relation to each organizational unit/level separately (see Figure 7). Again, the results show higher levels of dissatisfaction with the branch or office than with the higher levels of which the branch or office is part. With this additional information, not available as a consequence of the FEVS, regional-level management would know to focus on branch level management for purposes of eliciting higher levels of satisfaction and engagement on the part of employees.

Figures 6 & 7 here

As a means of further probing how questions relating to the term, “my organization” are processed and understood, respondents were asked to rank each organizational level (agency, region, division, branch) according to the degree to which the employee interpreted the, “my organization” questions as referring to that level. Specifically, the employees were asked;

Several of the preceding questions in the survey asked you about your thoughts and perceptions toward "your organization". When you see this term or are asked by someone about your organization, which levels of the organization are most prominent in your mind or most stand out to you? Please rank the following from 1 to 4, where 1 is the most prominent and 4 is the least.”

The results, shown in Figure 8, reveal significant differences in interpretation among the employees. The two levels that the employees associate most closely with the term, “my organization” are the highest level (agency) and the lowest level (branch) respectively. Conversely, these are the same two levels that the employees associate least with, “my organization.” Thus, approximately a third of the employees identify the agency as a whole as the appropriate, “my organization” referent, and another thirty percent identify their branch. Approximately forty percent of employees rank the branch as the level least associated with the term, “my organization” and other forty percent identify the least appropriate “my organization” referent as the agency as a whole. These findings are particularly revealing of the extent of divergence among employees in their interpretations of the term, “my organization” and is suggestive of the confusion that may prevail with the other highlighted terms.

Figure 8 here

As a means of better understanding how employees process these questions, we posed an open-ended question as follows; “Can you further elaborate on your ranking above to help us better understand how you think about and conceptualize "your organization"? A number of employees commented that their response to the, “my organization” question is contingent on who is asking the question. Thus, one employee wrote, “I think my response differs depending on who's asking. If it's a colleague from Region Y, I think of my division. If it's someone outside the federal family, I think Agency X as a whole. Here, I think of my relatively small division.”

Another set of comments highlighted a relationship between the employee’s response and the nature of the work of the office to which the employee is assigned. One employee wrote, “In my division are three branches and the work of the three branches are interdependent and inform

the work of each other, mostly. This interdependence is in large part why I view the division as the prominent entity.” Another employee wrote, “Agency X as a whole and Region Y are most prominent because I work in the Office of the Regional Administrator and we cross all programs.”

A third set of comments in response to the open-ended question, highlighted the nature of the individual employee’s job as a factor in the identification of the level/unit associated with “my organization. More specifically an employee whose job duties cause him/her to engage with those from outside his/her immediate branch or division on a regular basis appeared more likely to specify the higher level unit as “my organization.” One employee wrote, “I find I need to collaborate with members of other divisions in Region Y. Therefore, Region Y, as the locus of my work and the people I work with, stands out most prominently as "my organization.”

“Senior Leaders”

The second term on which our investigation focused was that of “senior leaders.” Table 1 presents the wording of the two items in the FEVS that include this term. The employees were asked;

When you hear the term 'senior leader' or are asked about your perception of senior leadership, what members of the organization do you consider to be senior leaders? Click all that apply.

The choices offered were one or more of;

- “Those at Agency headquarters in Washington,”
- “Those above the division directors in Region Y (Regional Administrator/Deputy Regional Administrator),”
- “Division Directors,” and

- “Branch Managers/Office Managers.”

The results, shown in Figure 9 reveal that employees interpret the term “senior leaders” very differently. The option selected most frequently was, “Those above the division directors in Region Y (Regional Administrator/Deputy Regional Administrator),” followed closely by, “Division Directors,” and, “Those at Agency headquarters in Washington.” The point made above would apply here as well: If the FEVS results show that employees are not satisfied with, “the policies and practices of [their] senior leaders,” and the term evokes such different interpretations, how does management know with which group and at which level to intervene?

Figure 9 here

A similar question was posed with regard to the term, “manager.” Specifically, employees were asked, “When you hear the term 'manager' or are asked about your perception of managers, what members of the organization are you considering? Click on all that apply.” In this instance there was substantial agreement that the term “managers” refers to those at the second organizational level – the branch – see Figure 10. Such an interpretation is logical in light of the definition of managers provided by OPM as, “Managers are those individuals in management positions who typically supervise one or more supervisors” (see Figure 3).

Figure 10 here

The open-ended survey responses provide insight as to why individuals may view or perceive the terms in the FEVs differently. We used the open-ended responses as indicators of the types of variables that may influence the organizational level most salient in the mind of the respondent when hearing the term ‘my organization’. Using a logistic regression model, we predicted which individuals would rank the agency as the level most closely associated with their organization (agency was first choice) and the level a respondent least associated with their

organization (agency was last, 4th choice). We explored three main categories of variables: personal demographics, job characteristics, and worker attitudes. For personal demographics we used age, gender, tenure (years with agency), and supervisor status. As one aspect of job characteristics, we measured the percentage of time employees spent working with employees at different levels of the organization. We asked them to provide the percentage of time they spent with: those within your section or branch (Time Spent – Branch); those outside of your branch/section but within your division (Time Spent – Division); those outside of your division, but within the region (Time Spent – Region); and those outside of your region (Time Spent – Outside). We only included the later three measures in the analysis to avoid issues of multicollinearity. Respondents were also asked the percentage to time they spent “out in the field” vs in the office (Time Spent – Field).

In addition, we measured five important job characteristics based on the items developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980). These characteristics were as follows: (i) My job affords me a good deal of autonomy in how I go about doing my work (Autonomy), (ii) My job involves doing a “whole” and identifiable piece of work. That is, my job tasks result in a complete piece of work that has an obvious beginning and end (Whole Work), (iii) There is great variety in my work that allows me to use a variety of my skills and talents (Use Skills), (iv) My managers let me know how well I am doing my job (Mngt Feedback), and (v) My job provides me with information about my work performance. That is, the actual work itself provide clues about how well I am doing –aside from any “feedback” co-workers or supervisors may provide (Performance Info). Finally, we examined whether the attitudes of the employees influenced the salient organizational level. Five different attitudes were measured using multi-item scales: organizational commitment, task significance, job satisfaction, person-organization fit, and social

impact. The results of the two logistic regression models are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: XXX

	Agency Level 1st Choice	Agency Level 4th Choice
Intercept	-0.65 (1.35)	0.73 (1.35)
Age	-0.24 (0.16)	0.04 (0.15)
Gender	-0.22 (0.26)	-0.24 (0.26)
Tenure	0.17 (0.13)	0.08 (0.13)
Supervisor Status	-0.88 (0.39)**	0.62 (0.36)*
Time Spent - Region	-0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)*
Time Spent - Division	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Time Spent - Outside	0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)**
Percent Time - Field	-0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)*
Job Char. - Autonomy	-0.08 (0.16)	-0.24 (0.16)
Job Char. - Whole Work	-0.28 (0.13)**	0.40 (0.13)***
Job Char. - Use Skills	-0.09 (0.16)	0.13 (0.16)
Job Char. - Mgmt Feedback	0.29 (0.15)**	-0.13 (0.14)
Job Char. - Performance Info	-0.37 (0.15)**	0.13 (0.15)
Public Service Motivation	-0.42 (0.27)	0.24 (0.28)
Organizational Commitment	-0.11 (0.19)	0.08 (0.19)
Task Significance	0.15 (0.26)	-0.31 (0.25)
Job Satisfaction	0.17 (0.20)	0.14 (0.20)
PO-Fit	0.21 (0.19)	-0.24 (0.19)
Social Impact	0.69 (0.25)***	-0.48 (0.24)**
AIC	457.77	457.40
BIC	561.00	560.63
Log Likelihood	-201.89	-201.70
Deviance	403.77	403.40
Num. obs.	338	338

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1

Note: both models controlled for the division of the respondent.

The results in table 1 suggest that variance in perception of the term organization, as it pertains to selecting the agency as either the most or least salient, was not associated with one's age, gender, or tenure. We did find that supervisor status was significantly associated with perception of organizational level. Specifically, those in a supervisory position (managers below

the division head level) were 60% ($\exp(-0.88) = 0.41$) less likely to choose the agency first and were 86% ($\exp(0.62) = 1.86$) more likely to place the agency last (4th out of 4). Thus, individuals who lead lower levels of an agency are more likely to associate the term ‘organization’ with those lower levels. Of the variables measuring time spent with employees at different levels of the organization, none were significant for selecting the agency first, and two were significant for selecting the agency last. We found that each additional percentage of time spent with employees outside of one’s division but within region, increase the odds of placing the agency last by 2%. Similarly, each additional percentage of time spend with employees outside of the region, decreased the likelihood that the agency was placed last by 2%.

With regard to the job characteristics, those who see their job as producing a whole and identifiable piece of work were less likely to associate the term ‘organization’ with the agency itself. Specifically, a one unit change on a five point Likert scale, corresponded to a 25% reduction ($\exp(-0.28) = 0.75$) in the odds of ranking the agency first, and a 50% increase ($\exp(0.40) = 1.49$) in the odds of ranking the agency last.

Of the attitudes measured, only social impact was found to have a significant effect. A one unit change on a five point scale corresponded to nearly doubling the odds ($\exp(0.69) = 1.99$) that the agency was placed first. Similarly, a one unit change amounted to a nearly 40% ($\exp(-0.48) = .62$) decrease in the odds of ranking the agency last. This suggest that those who perceive their work as having a positive impact and benefiting others are more likely to associate their “organization” with the agency as a whole. Those who see less of an impact or contribution to lives of others, are more likely to see the lower levels of the agency as the most closely corresponding to the term ‘organization’. Overall, these findings offer some initial evidence that individual interpretation of ambiguous terms on the FEVs are not simply idiosyncratic but rather

a function of one's job characteristics and perception of the impact of their work.

Findings - Interviews

As a follow up to the survey, we conducted a series of interviews with selected agency employees including three division heads, two branch heads and four rank-and-file employees. The interviewees were asked to articulate how they thought about the terms referenced in Table 1 in the context of the FEVS.

One branch head noted that the division of which the head is part is conducting its own, follow-up survey as a consequence of the gaps in information left by the FEVS. The respondent commented; "In the follow-up survey we are being really specific and saying 'my section chief' or 'my branch chief,' trying to be as crystal clear as we can be."

Another branch head highlighted the FEVS question that reads, "Overall, how good a job do you feel is being done by the manager directly above your immediate supervisor?" This manager said that she had had to recalibrate her response upon realizing that for most employees in the branch, she was the referent;

This is the first year we got branch level data and that was extremely helpful although I laugh because there is a question, 'my supervisor above my supervisor does a good job.' For most of the branch, they are talking about me. Well, I put on that question I think something negative and I think, 'oh man, next year I'm going to have to answer that positively because most people will think they are talking about me'."

Asked about use and interpretation of the term, "senior leader," a division head commented: "It drives me crazy. I would like to know who they are referring to by the term, 'senior leader.' Are they referring to me? To the RA? A combination?" She asked rhetorically,

“Am I having a negative impact or is it at the top of the region?”

Discussion and Conclusion

Although our study was confined to a single regional office in a single federal agency, we are aware of no basis on which to hypothesize that the agency or region in which our study was conducted is exceptional in relation to the issues that serve as a subject of this study. That so wide a range of interpretations is placed on terms which, in the context of the context of the directives coming from the Executive Office of the President, are consequential for how agencies approach the challenge of increasing employee engagement, highlights the need for revisions to the FEVS.

In fact, and coincident with our study, OPM has been working on such revisions. In 2016 OPM issued a proposed “rule” to update and modernize the annual employee survey. In the final rule, issued in December 2016, OPM references comments made in response to the proposed rule with regard to the terminology used in the FEVS;

Two individuals indicated that Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey references to senior leader, manager and supervisory levels in questions are not clear to employees taking the survey, notwithstanding the terms' definitions in 5 CFR part 250 (Personnel Management in Agencies, 2016, p. 89363).

OPM’s official response to those comments, included in the rule, read as follows;

OPM acknowledges that general terms and definitions for leadership levels (senior leader, manager, and supervisor) may vary greatly from agency to agency and it is imperative to give agencies and respondents a clearer understanding of each level for accurate answers/data. In light of the comments and ongoing discussions on the definitions of levels of leadership within organizations, OPM removed the definitions

from the regulation to allow for additional discussion and revision for future versions of the survey towards the goal of achieving greater clarity for agencies and survey respondents (Personnel Management in Agencies, 2016, p. 89363).

OPM's new rule is in part a response to the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010. In the introduction, OPM comments, "The final rule sets forth a set of actions and practices that will better position human capital to demonstrate its contribution to agency mission through the alignment of Strategic Human Capital Management practices to the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act (GPRMA) of 2010" (Personnel Management in Agencies, 2016, p. 89357). One of the "Cross Agency Priority" (CAP) goals set by the Obama administration pursuant to GPRMA is to increase the level of employee engagement government-wide from 63 percent to 67 percent. In referencing the goal as well as a recent decline in the Employee Engagement Index as compiled from selected FEVS questions, the GAO (2015, p. 1) commented that, "...agency leaders are to be held accountable for making employee engagement a priority, as well as an integral part of their agency's performance management system." Such considerations make it all the more important that organizational leaders and managers be provided with information that can enable federal managers to act in ways that promote increased employee engagement. The present FEVS instrument, as OPM acknowledges falls short in that regard.

According to OPM officials, implementation of a revised survey instrument could occur in 2018. An unknown is who President Trump will appoint as OPM director and to what extent that individual will regard employee engagement and/or the annual survey as priorities.

Although the President's initial moves have not been favorable to the federal bureaucracy with large cuts in staffing levels purportedly in the works, the administration may recognize if service

levels are to be maintained a level of productivity on the part of the employees who remain will be needed. It would therefore be in the administration's interest to ensure that working conditions are conducive to such an outcome. Continued attention to the FEVS and to ensuring that the data generated thereby can be used to maximum effect in the workplace would thus seem consistent with the administration's objectives.

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Appendix A

Survey of Regional Office Employees

The overall survey included nineteen items. The items relating to the present study are listed below. Employees were presented with a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly agree to “strongly disagree.

- Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: I recommend my organization as a good place to work.

- Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization?

- Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement.
 - I recommend Agency X as a good place to work
 - I recommend Region Y as a good place to work
 - I recommend my Division/Office as a good place to work
 - I recommend my Branch/Office as a good place to work

- Please rate your satisfaction for the following items:
 - Considering everything, how satisfied are you with Agency X?
 - Considering everything, how satisfied are you with Region Y?
 - Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your Division/Office?
 - Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your Branch/Office?

- You have almost completed the survey. Thank you for your time and help. We have just a few more questions. As you may be aware, the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey asks several questions each year about one's 'leaders' and 'managers' in the organization. We are interested in understanding how you perceive these terms. When you hear the term 'senior leader' or are asked about your perception of senior leadership, what members of the organization do you consider to be senior leaders?
 - Those at Agency X headquarters in Washington
 - Those above the division directions in Region Y (Regional Administrator, Deputy Regional Administrator)
 - Division Directors
 - Branch Managers/Office Managers

- When you hear the term 'manager' or are asked about your perception of managers, what members of the organization are you considering?
 - Division Directors
 - Branch Managers/Office Managers
 - Other

- As you know, federal agencies like Agency X often operate through extensive field structures broken into regions. Several of the preceding questions in the survey asked you about your thoughts and perceptions toward "your organization". When you see this term or are asked by someone about your organization, which levels of the organization are most prominent in your mind or most stand out to you? Please rank the following from 1 to 4, where 1 is the most prominent and 4 is the least.
 - Agency X as a whole
 - Region Y
 - My division within Region Y
 - My branch or office
- Can you further elaborate on your ranking above to help us better understand how you think about and conceptualize "your organization"? (open-ended)

Endnote

- 1 The Employee Engagement Index is calculated on the basis of fifteen questions in the FEVS (GAO, 2015).

Figure 1
Organizational Levels/Units

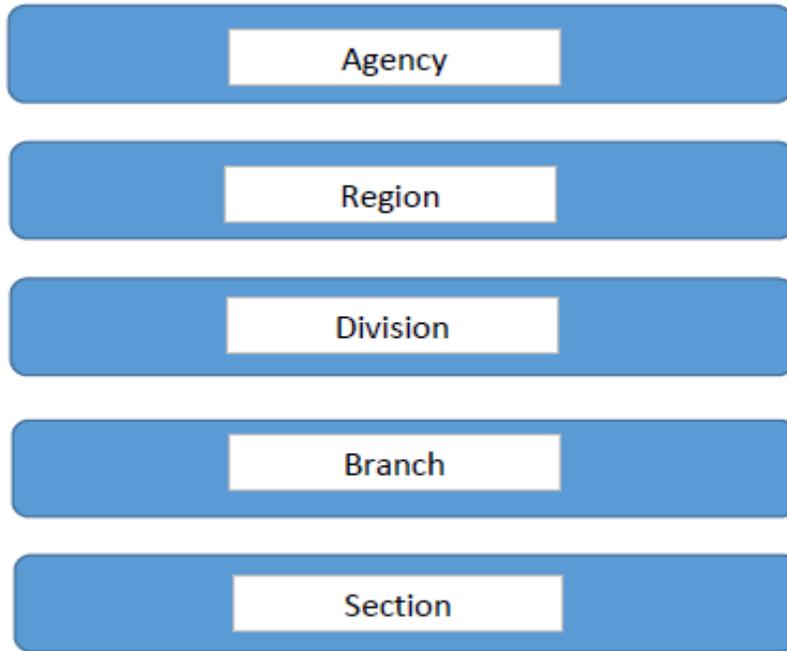


Figure 2

Ambiguous Terms Used in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

Term	Examples
"my organization"	"I recommend <u>my organization</u> as a good place to work." (40) "Considering everything, how satisfied are you with <u>your organization</u> ?" (71)
"leaders"	"In <u>my organization</u> , <u>leaders</u> generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce." (53) " <u>My organization's leaders</u> maintain high standards of honesty and integrity." (54)
"managers"	" <u>Managers</u> communicate the goals and priorities of the organization." (56) " <u>Managers</u> review and evaluate the organization's progress toward meeting its goals and objectives." (57) " <u>Managers</u> promote communication among different work units (for example, about projects, goals, needed resources)." (58) " <u>Managers</u> support collaboration across work units to accomplish work objectives." (59)
"senior leaders"	"I have a high level of respect for my organization's <u>senior leaders</u> ." (61) "How satisfied are you with the policies and practices of your <u>senior leaders</u> ?" (66)
"management"	"How satisfied are you with the information you receive from <u>management</u> on what's going on in your organization?" (64)

Figure 3

Definitions of Terms Employed in the Federal Employee View Point Survey

Agency means an executive agency as defined in 5 U.S.C. 105.

Executives are members of the Senior Executive Service or equivalent.

Leaders are an agency's management team. This includes anyone with supervisory or managerial duties.

Managers are those individuals in management positions who typically supervise one or more supervisors.

Organization means an agency, office, or division.

Supervisors are first-line supervisors who do not supervise other supervisors; typically those who are responsible for employees' performance appraisals and approval of their leave.

Team leaders are those who provide employees with day-to-day guidance in work projects, but do not have supervisory responsibilities or conduct performance appraisals.

Work unit means an immediate work unit headed by an immediate supervisor.

Source: Code of Federal Regulations - 5 CFR 250.301 - Definitions.

Figure 4

“I recommend my organization as a good place to work” – Level/Unit Unspecified

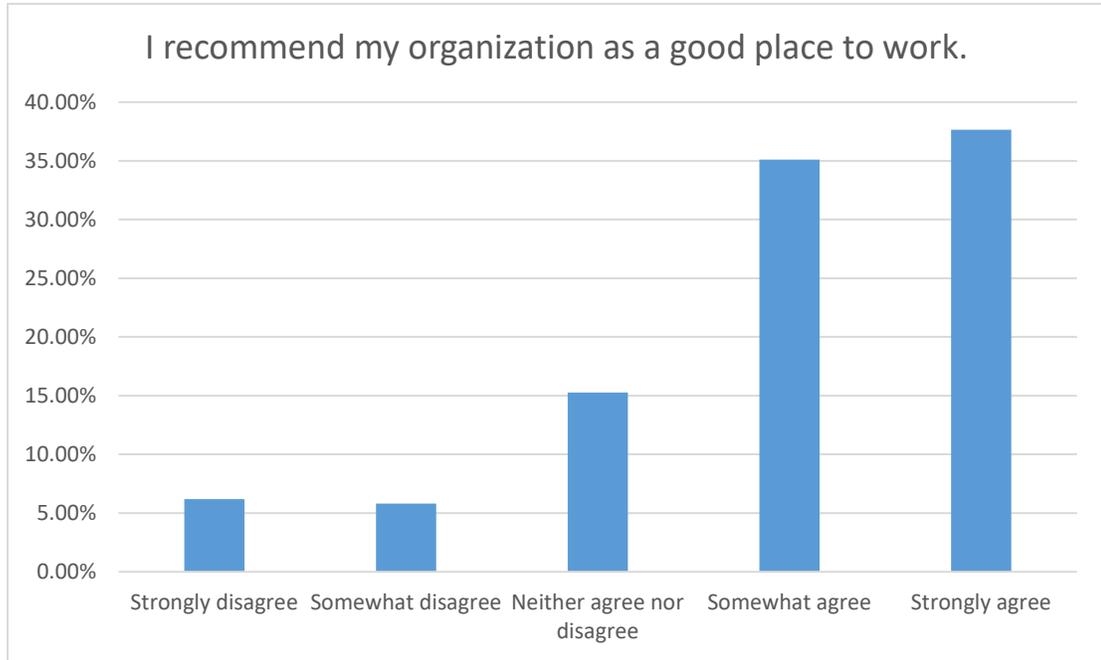


Figure 5

“I recommend my organization as a good place to work” – Level/Unit Specified

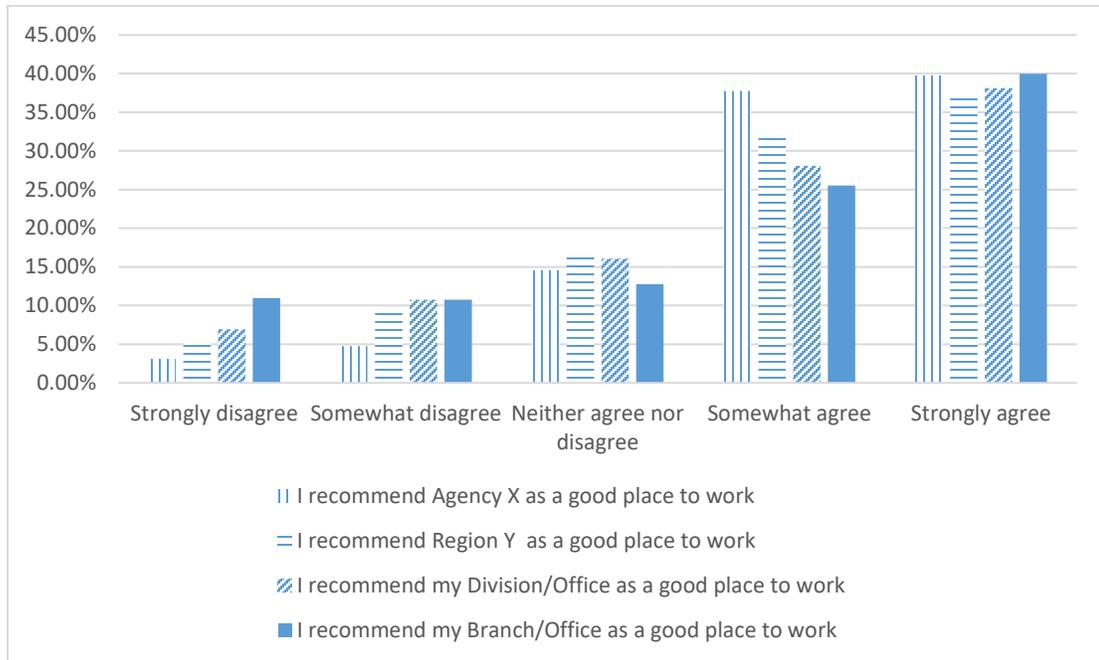


Figure 6

“Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization?” – Level/Unit Unspecified



Figure 7

“Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization?” – Level/Unit Specified

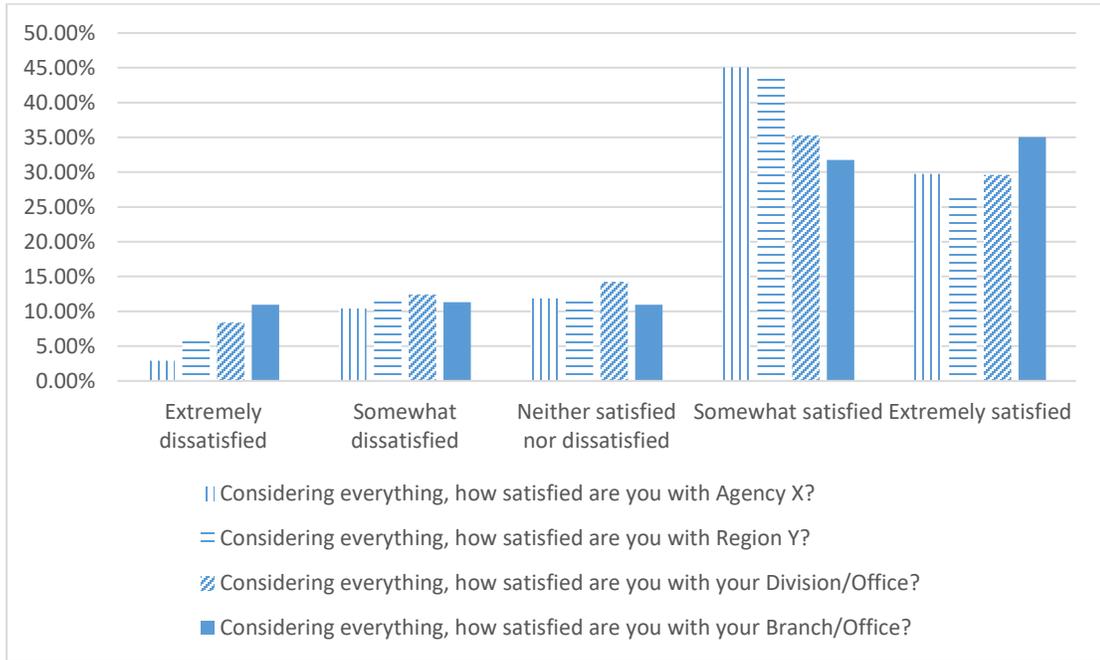


Figure 8

What level does the term “my organization” evoke?

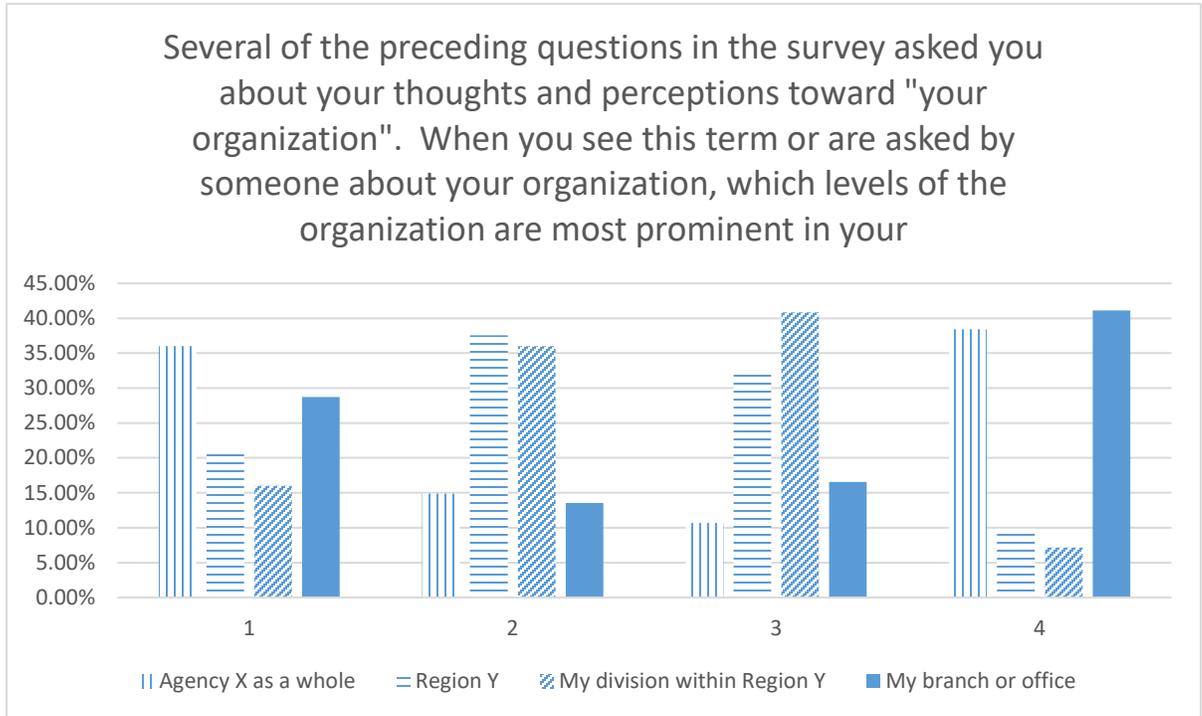


Figure 9

What members of the organization do you consider to be senior leaders?



Figure 10

What members of the organization do you consider to be “managers”?

