

# Public Sector Staffing: Beyond Faster and Cheaper

Presentation to the IPMA-HR Assessment Council Annual  
Conference  
June 22, 2004



**U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board**  
**Office of Policy and Evaluation**

# About MSPB

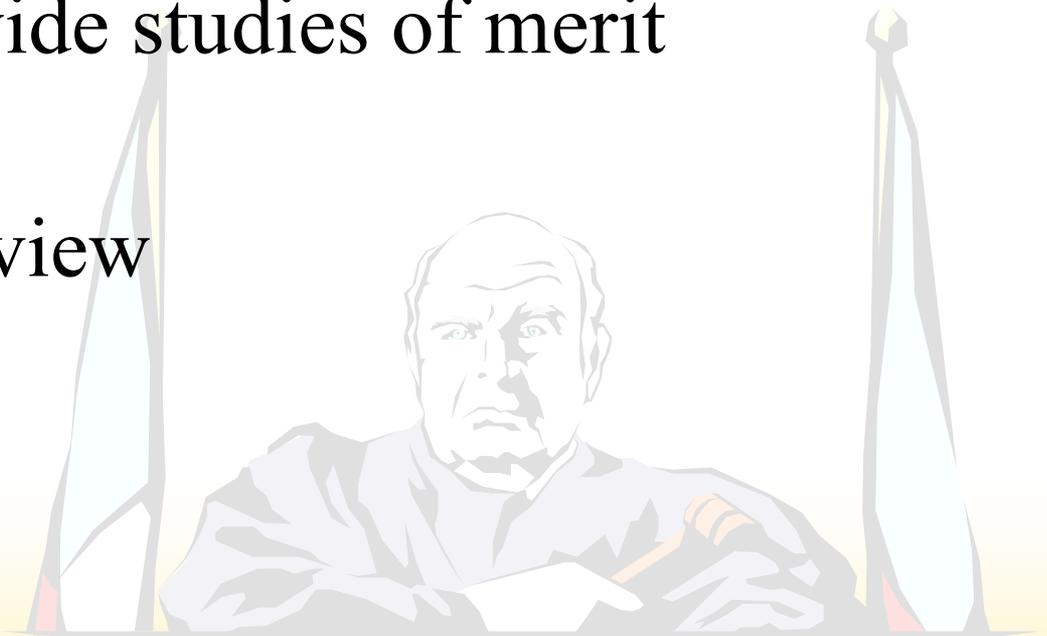
- A Federal agency
- Successor to the Civil Service Commission
- One of several agencies with a role in Federal human capital management



# MSPB's Mission

Protect the merit system through:

- Adjudication and enforcement
- Governmentwide studies of merit systems
- Regulatory review



# Office of Policy and Evaluation

Conducts independent, nonpartisan, objective studies that:

- Support merit system values
- Enhance human resources management
- Ensure the public interest

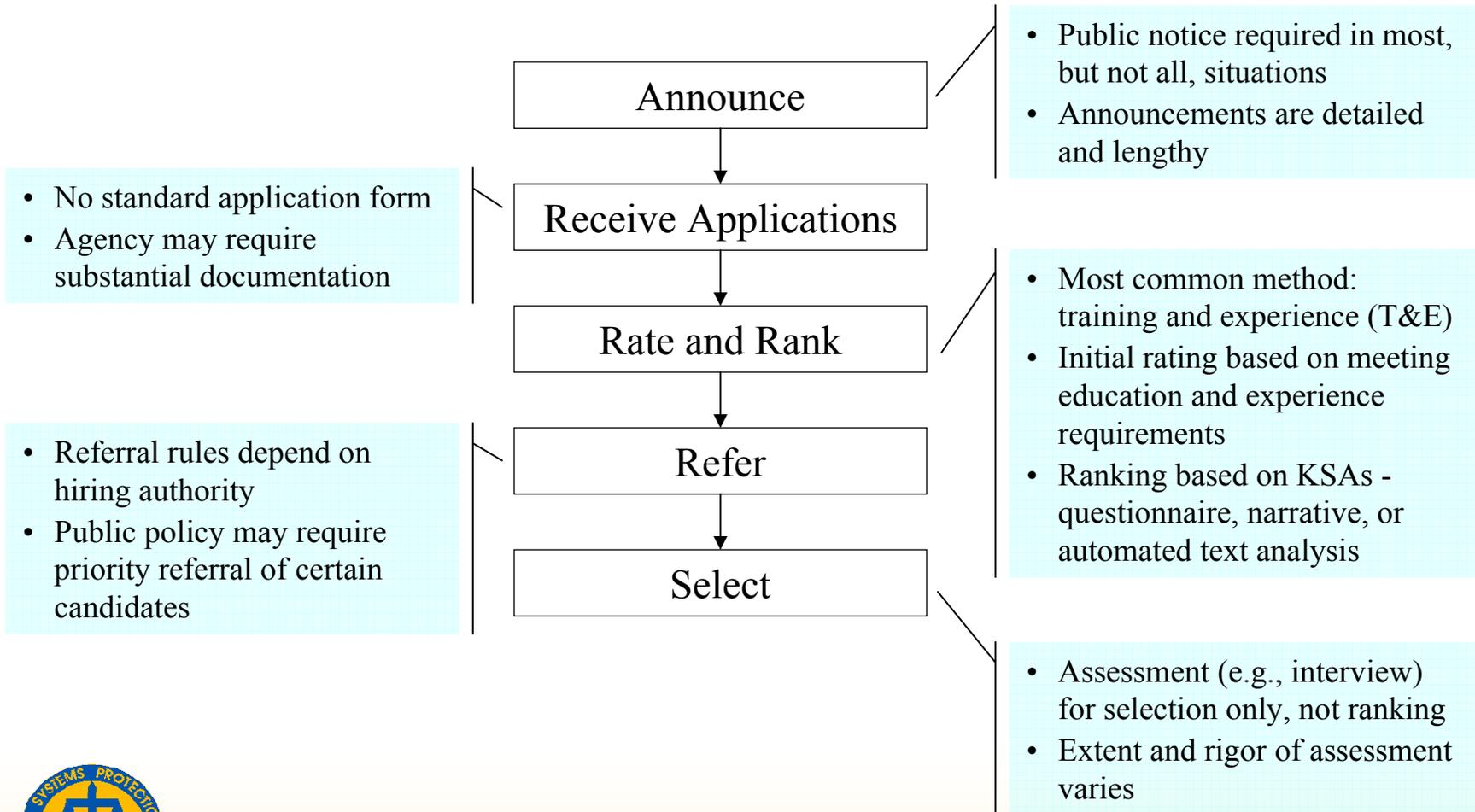


# Overview

- MSPB research highlights
  - Federal hiring system
  - Recruitment
  - Probationary period
- Lessons learned: A model for the future



# A Typical Federal Hiring Process



# Background

- The concept of merit is universal
- Law and regulations govern -
  - Who may be considered for a job
  - How applicants are assessed
  - How HR offices refer candidates
  - How managers select among candidates
- Specific rules and practices are contextual



# Background

- Trend toward -
  - Decentralization and delegation
  - Alternative HR systems
  - Deregulation
  - Reducing time to hire
  - Eliminating barriers
  - Flexibility



# Requirements and Processes Vary

## Factor

## Illustration

### Agency

- The Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs have different processes for assessing and hiring medical professionals.
- Agencies may – or may not – use objective tests when filling clerical positions. Test results are not necessarily “portable.”

### Occupation

- Veterans preference carries no formal weight when hiring attorneys; veterans preference is a factor for HR positions; veterans preference is a factor for engineering positions – but its weight depends on the level of the position.

### Situation

- Usually, agencies must administer and score a questionnaire – and use the results– when filling entry-level administrative jobs. However, this is not required for candidates who meet a grade-point average criterion.
- Test requirements and selection rules may be waived under certain labor market conditions. The waiver may be restricted to certain locations, agencies, or grade levels.



# The Downside of “Flexibility”

- No unified process or system
  - Limited economies of scale
  - Confusing to job applicants
  - Prone to perceptions of unfairness
  - Varying assessment methods
- Varying results



# Findings from MSPB Research

- *Federal vacancy announcements*
  - Many are poorly written and confusing
- *Federal examining (hiring) offices*
  - Technical competence varies
  - Resources often limited
- *Merit principles survey*
  - Federal employees are uncertain of the fairness of the hiring process



# Findings from Research in Progress

- *Recruitment programs* -
  - Receive increased attention
  - Vary in level of support and execution
  - Work best with a supportive hiring process



# Findings from Research in Progress

- *Automated hiring systems* -
  - Have great potential
  - Introduce new challenges
  - Demand competent users
  - Permit - but do not require - systemic improvements in assessment



# Findings from Research in Progress

- *The probationary period for new hires -*
  - Is a critical part of the examination
  - Is not always used effectively
  - Appears particularly important for entry-level hiring
  - Must be long enough to permit observation of job performance



# Systemic Findings

- Excessive complexity can -
  - Emphasize process over substance
  - Divert attention from assessment
  - Undermine perceptions of fairness
- “Best practices” are not identical, but all reflect a systemic approach - and integrate recruitment, technology, and assessment



# Elements of A Better Way

- Strategy, not tactics
- Recruit and market
- Manage the talent pool
  - Make requirements and rewards clear
  - Provide job previews
  - Encourage “self-selection”
- Permit a link between recruiting and hiring

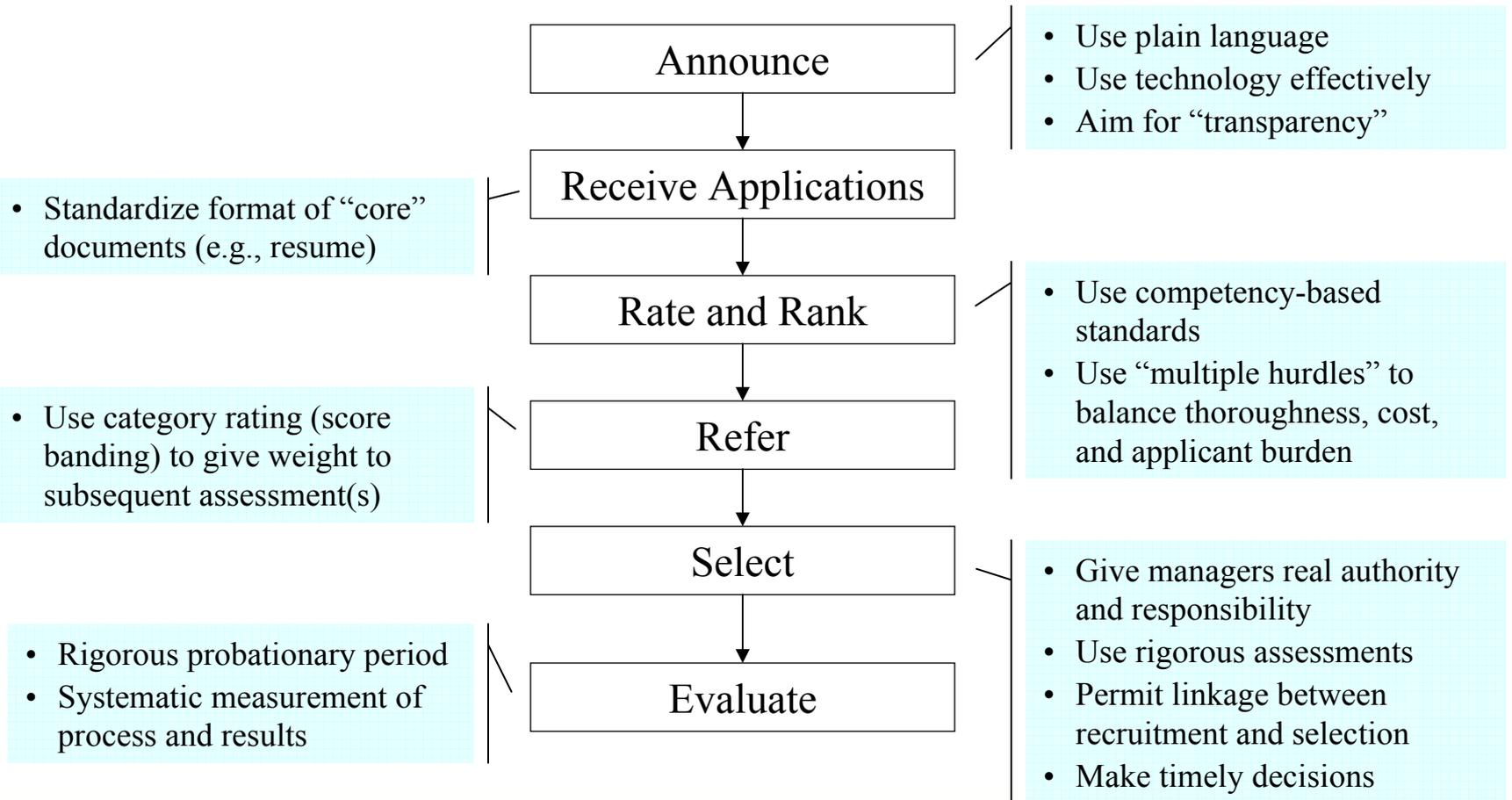


# Elements of A Better Way

- Recognize the limits of -
  - “Single hurdle” approaches
  - Centralized assessment
- Assess carefully
- Make assessments carry appropriate weight



# A Better Process



# Federal Recruitment Trends



# Recruitment and the Hiring Process

## Recruitment IS:

- Building a pool of qualified, interested candidates

## Recruitment IS NOT:

- Assessing candidates and making a selection

## Recruitment SHOULD:

- Align with all aspects of the hiring process



# Why Recruitment Matters

- Need to build a quality workforce
  - For the long term
  - That can change with the organization
- Need to address changing workforce environment
- Need to address HC Crisis



# The Current Trend: Variability

*Increased attention, varying execution –*

- Varying sources and levels of funding
- Varying roles – but HR usually takes the lead
- Varying levels of recruiter training
- Varying levels of planning and analysis
- Varying use of financial incentives



# Factors Affecting Programs

Informal

- Non-technical
- Non-entry grades

Formal

- Technical
- Mission critical
- Entry grades (05/07/09)

Decentralized

- Individual jobs
- Local activities

Centralized

- High volume
- Corporate branding
- Mission-critical



# Factors Affecting Strategy Usage

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Web site/USAJOBS	Convey an improved image to the public and educate applicants on benefits of working for the Government and how to apply.
College Visits and Job Fairs	Expand agency exposure and rebuild relationships with colleges, universities, and the public.
Paid Advertising	Target specific trade and/or professional audiences.
Professional Networks	Network with related professional organizations to identify potential applicants and recruitment sources.



# Recruitment Challenges

External	Internal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Labor market shortages (some occupations)</li><li>• Higher salaries</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Image</li><li>• Lack of HR capacity</li><li>• Budget constraints</li><li>• Complex hiring process</li><li>• Can't reach targeted recruits</li></ul>



# Recommendations



Get Management Support

Be Proactive

Plan

Market, Market, Market

Build Relationships

Educate Candidates

Streamline

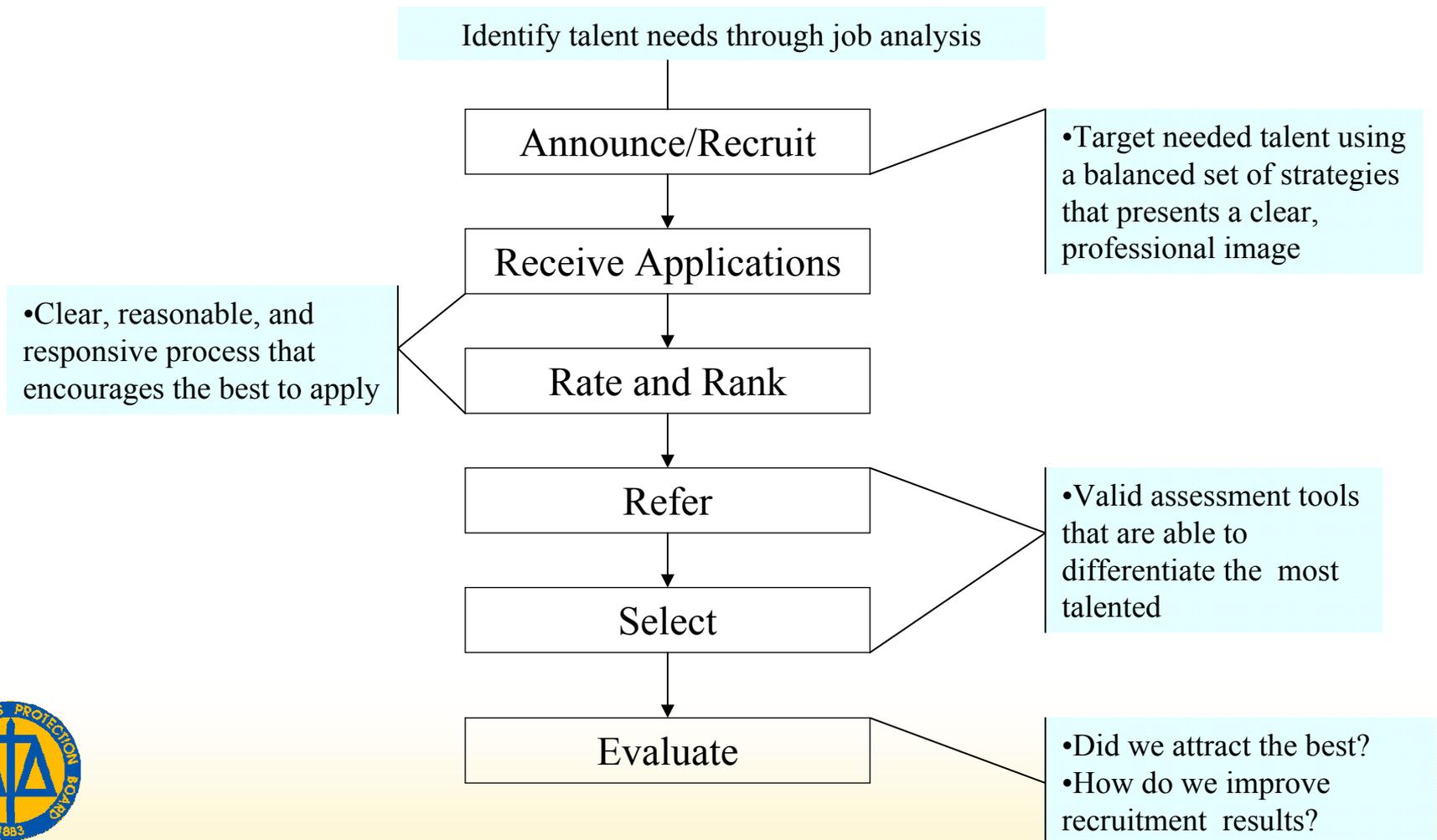
Use Technology

Use Flexibilities

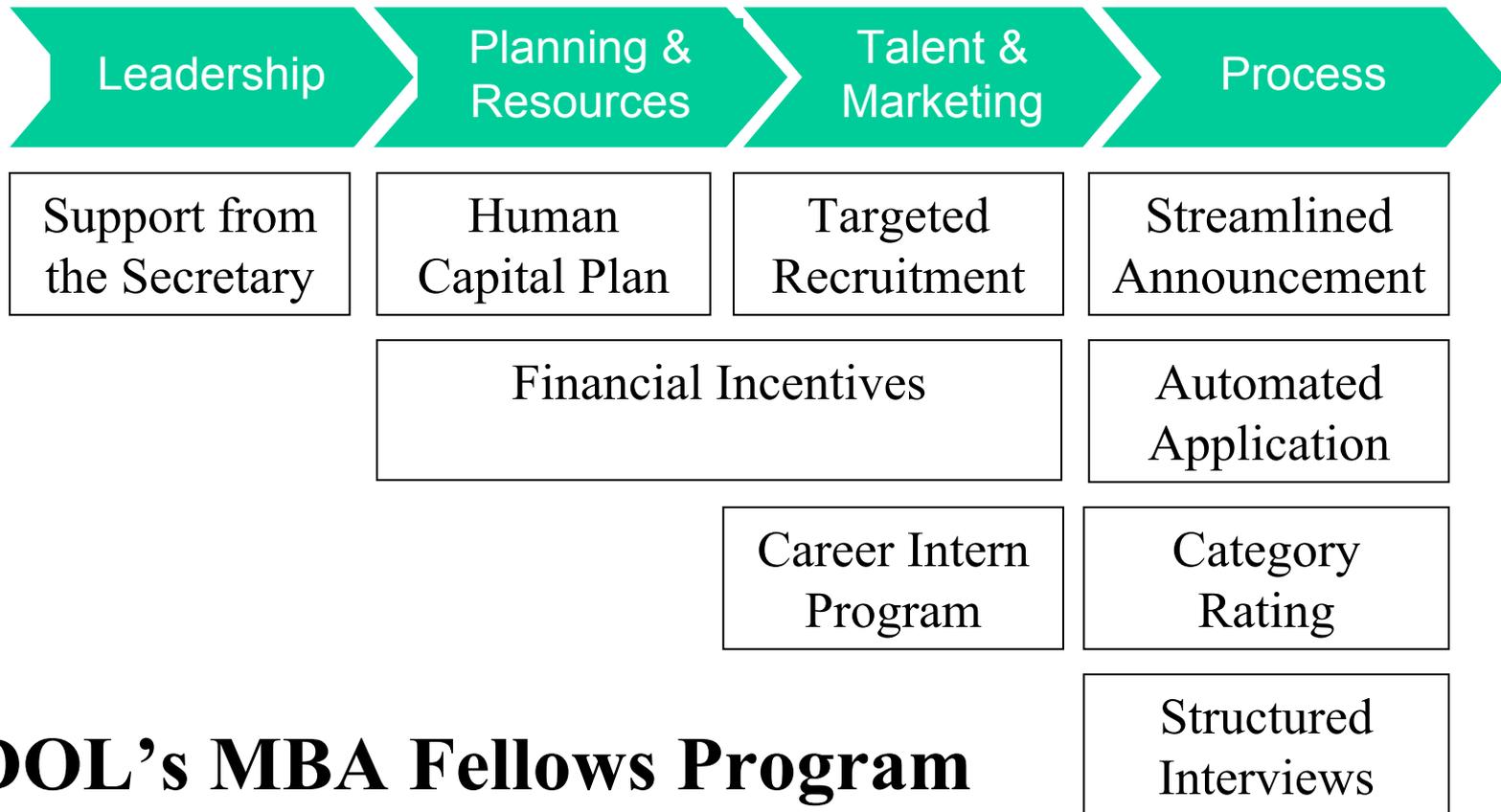
Measure



# Effective Recruitment Alignment with Overall Process



# Illustration(s)



## DOL's MBA Fellows Program



# Probation as an Assessment Tool



# Probation as an Assessment Tool

When should the agency assess a potential employee?

Before selection.

Before appointment becomes final.



# Probation as an Assessment Tool

## Purpose of the Probationary Period in Federal Civil Service:

- ◎ It is the last stage before the appointment becomes final in the competitive service.
- ◎ Similar purpose in excepted service.



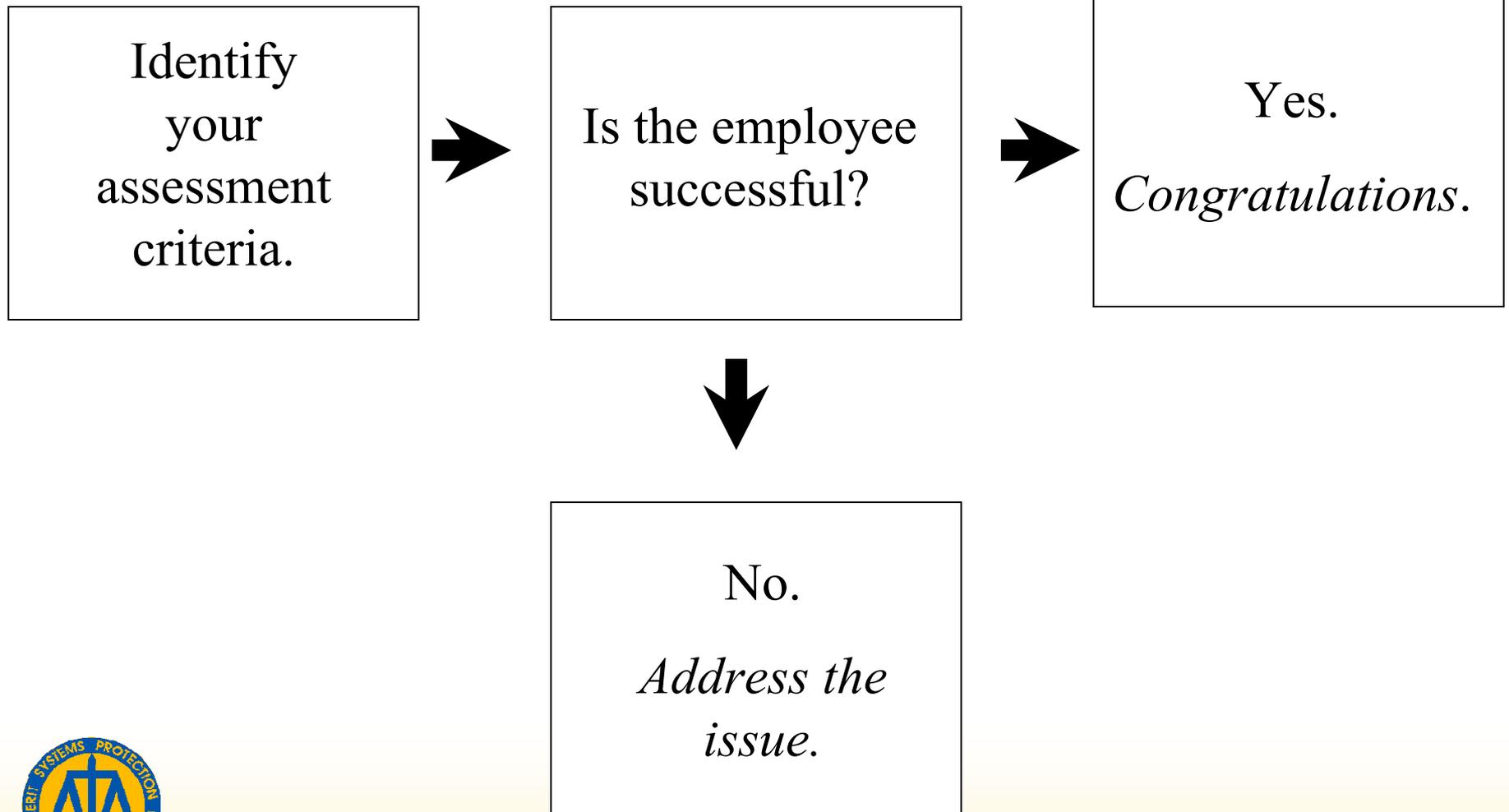
# Probation as an Assessment Tool

## Length of Probationary Period:

- ◎ Typically 1 year for the competitive service.
- ◎ Not all positions are the same--trainee positions may need more time to assess.
- ◎ Some agencies are seeking greater flexibility on length--DHS proposed regulations



# Probation as an Assessment Tool



# Probation as an Assessment Tool

*Not meeting  
assessment criteria?*

```
graph TD; A["Not meeting  
assessment criteria?"] --> B["Can the employee  
meet the  
assessment criteria  
with minimal  
investment?"]; A --> C["Would the employee  
be more successful in  
a different position?"]; A --> D["If you could do it  
over, would you  
still select this  
person?"];
```

Can the employee  
meet the  
assessment criteria  
with *minimal*  
investment?

Would the employee  
be more successful in  
a different position?

If you could do it  
over, would you  
still select this  
person?

# Probation as an Assessment Tool

Remember: The point of the probationary period is to use on-the-job performance and conduct to assess if this person should have the appointment finalized.

Never forget that the candidate is a human being, but if this person was a house you were planning to buy, and you found this many issues, would you finalize the deal or back out?



Over the course of a career, a poor fit can be very expensive -- in salary and in lost productivity.

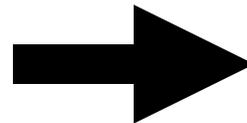
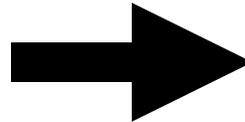
# Probation as an Assessment Tool

## Probationary Employee

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Management performs assessment to determine if appointment should become final.

Employee must prove he/she is fully fit in conduct and character.



## Status Employee

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Management performs on-going assessment.

Management must prove employee damages efficiency of the service.\*



\* Standard for taking action is expected to be slightly different for DoD/DHS in the future

# Making the Most of the Probationary Period

## When do you notify?

Before offer is accepted:

- ✓ In interview process is fine as an additional notice-but put it in the job offer.
- ✓ Too much legalese in advance can be off-putting, but limited rights should not come as a surprise when separated.



# Probation as an Assessment Tool

## After Appointment (Reinforcement)

➤ Putting it in the employee handbook is helpful.

➤ Signed Acknowledgement--

Make sure the employee gets a copy.

➤ Supervisor's Expectations--

Supervisors should express their expectations for success (conduct and performance) at the start. This is a logical time to mention (in a non-threatening manner) the consequences if standards are not met.

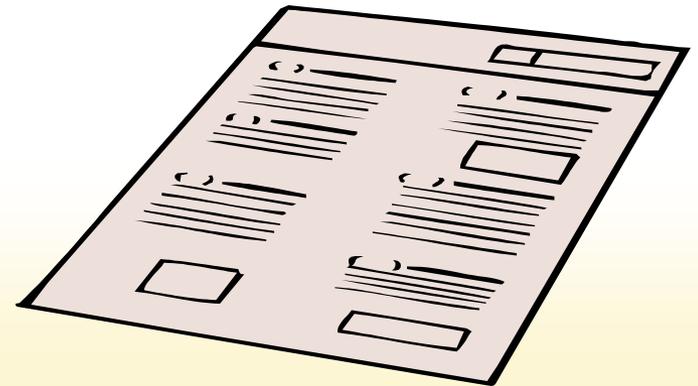


# Probation as an Assessment Tool

	Probation Complete	Termination	Resignation	Separation - No Fault
Direct Hire (not Luevano)	79%	1%	12%	8%
Luevano	76%	1%	11%	12%
ACWA Certificate	64%	3%	10%	23%
DEU Certificate	62%	4%	22%	12%
OPM Certificate	59%	4%	13%	24%

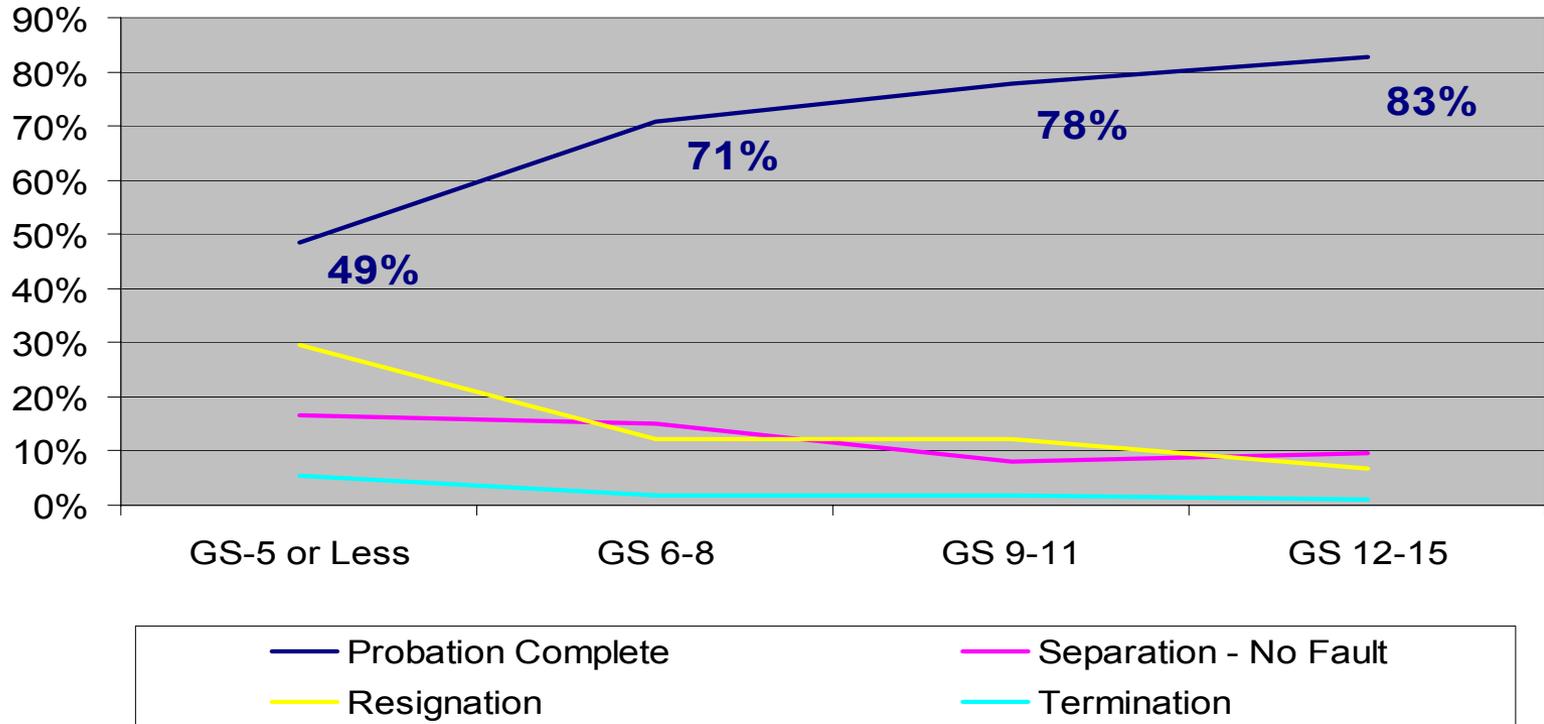


\* Results from FY 2001 & 2002 CPDF data.



# Probation as an Assessment Tool

White Collar Probationary Period Results Separated by Pay Grade



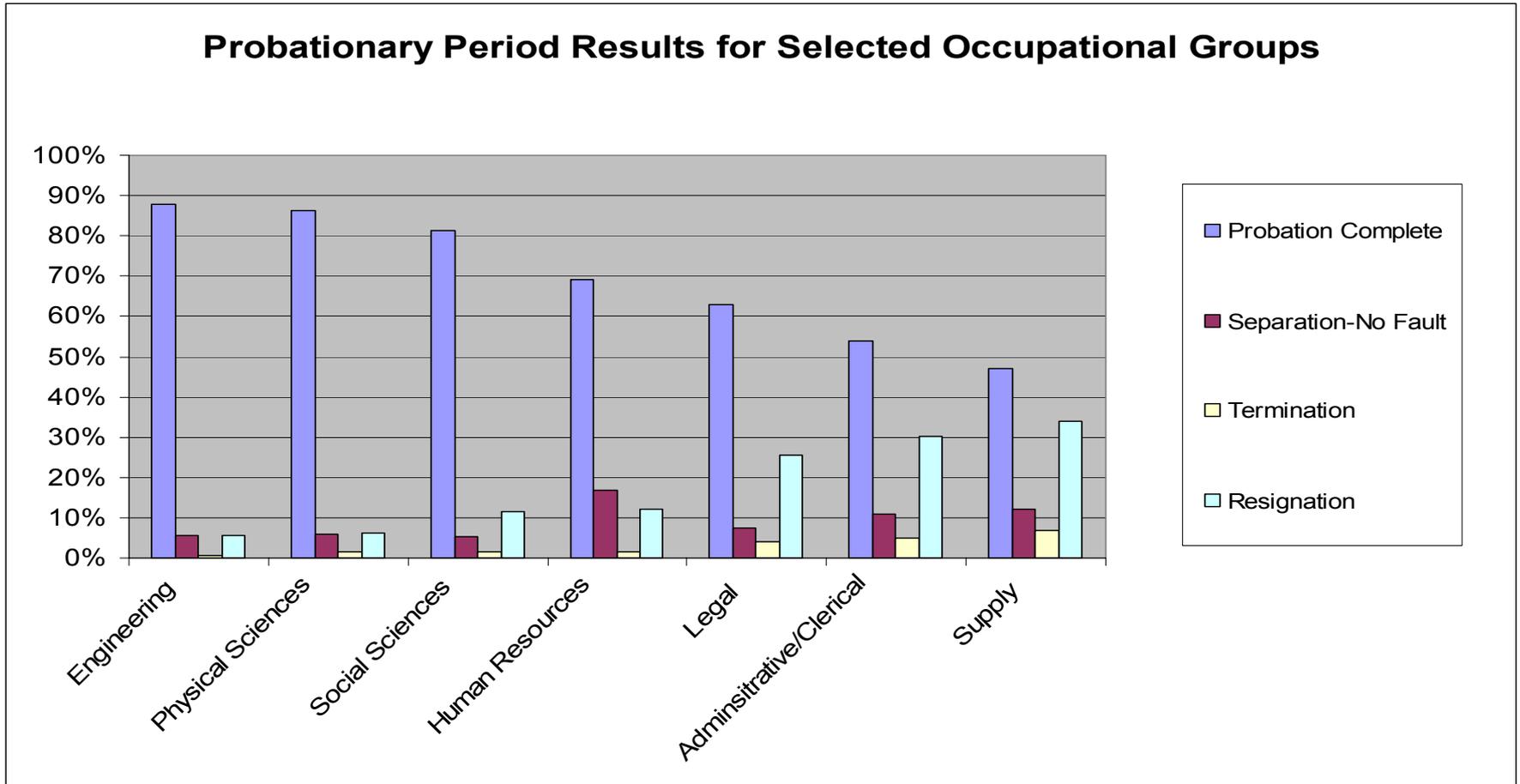
# Probation as an Assessment Tool

	Probation Complete	Termination	Resignation	Separation - No Fault
General Schedule	61%	4%	21%	14%
Federal Wage System	75%	6%	11%	8%

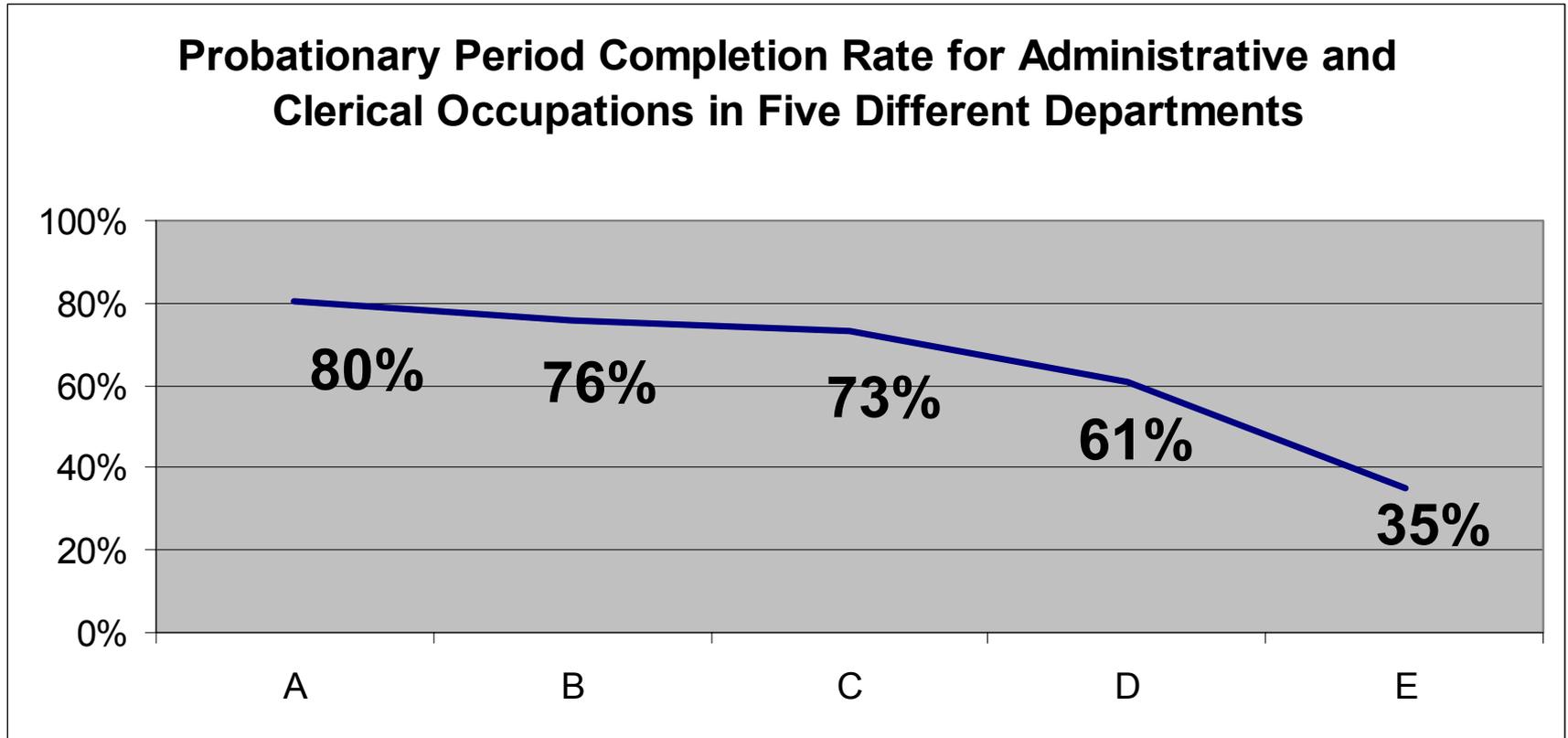


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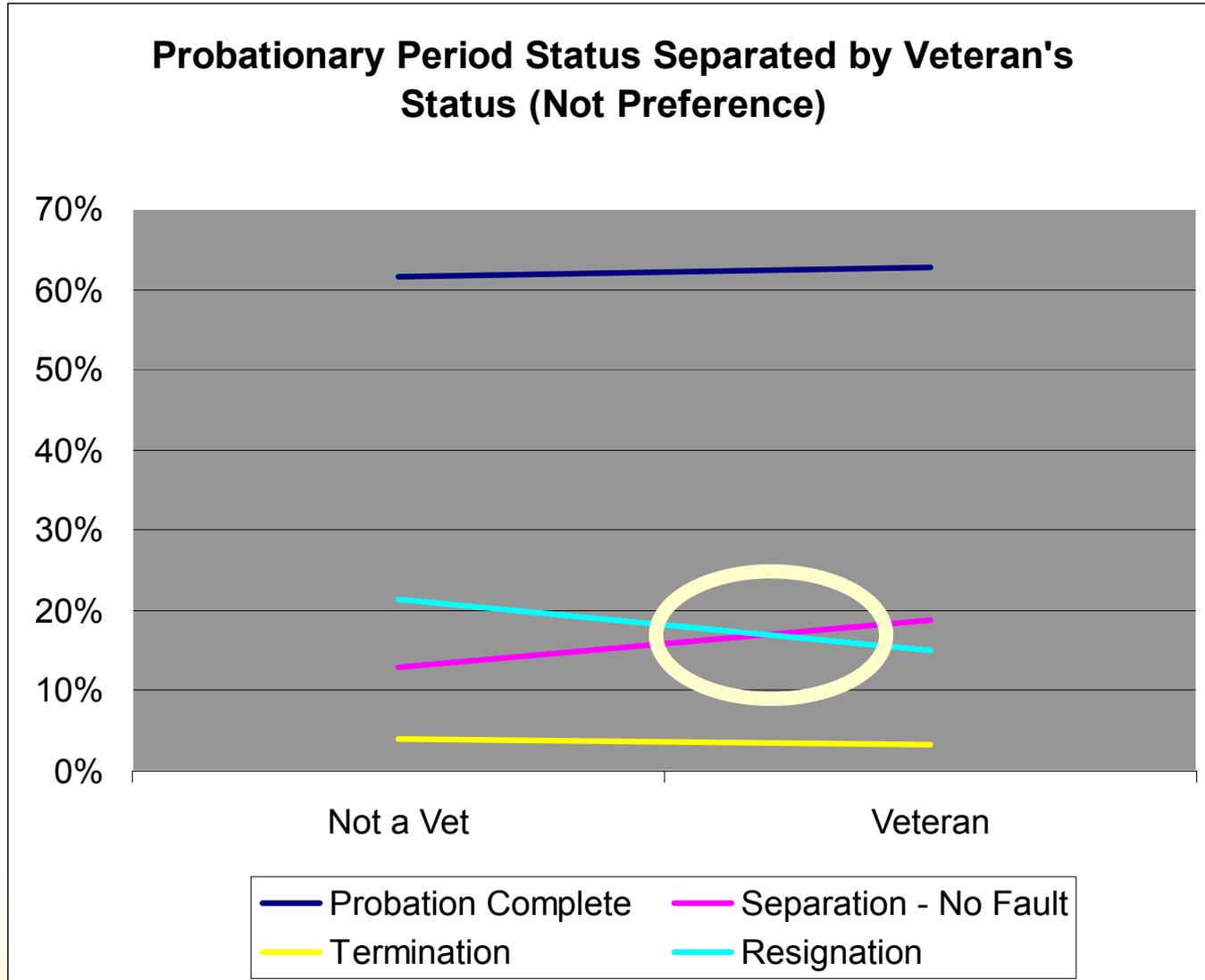
# Probation as an Assessment Tool



# Probation as an Assessment Tool



# Probation as an Assessment Tool



# Inter-related Processes



# Inter-related Processes

Result is affected by:

- ☑ Who do you recruit?
- ☑ How do you recruit?
- ☑ How do you assess applicants?
- ☑ How does the applicant assess you?
- ☑ How do you assess probationers?
- ☑ How does the probationer assess you?



# For More Information

<b>Published Studies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Federal Workforce for the 21st Century: Results of the Merit Principles Survey 2000 (Nov 2003)</li><li>• Help Wanted: A Review of Federal Vacancy Announcements (Apr 2003)</li><li>• The Federal Selection Interview: Unrealized Potential (Feb 2003)</li><li>• Assessing Federal Job Seekers in a Delegated Examining Environment (Feb 2002)</li><li>• The Federal Merit Promotion Program: Process vs. Outcome (Feb 2002)</li></ul>
<b>Contacts</b>	(202) 653-6772 Annette Butler, ext. 1295
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