

Building Better Supervisors: Insights from Federal Employee Survey Data

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



MPSB Mission

Protect Federal merit systems and the rights of individuals within those systems.

Adjudication

Merit System Studies

Review of Significant Actions of OPM



Overview

- What we did
- What we found
 - Background
 - Assessment and selection practices
 - Perceived skills and performance
- Lessons learned

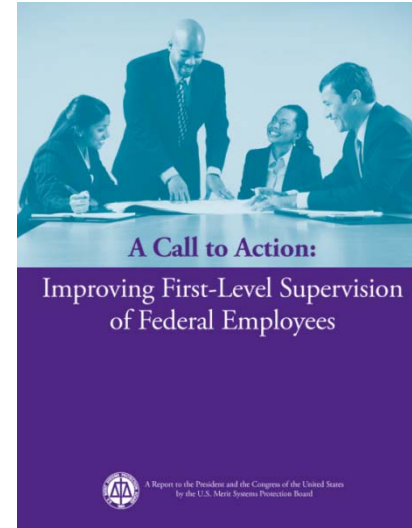
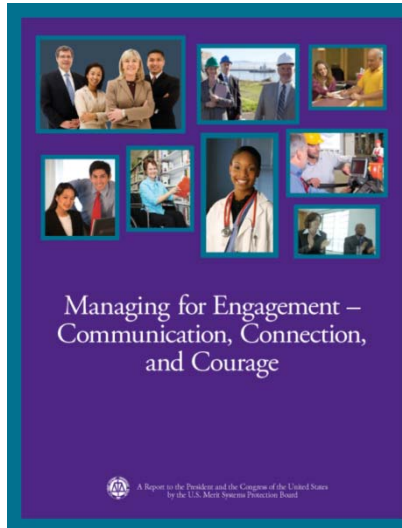
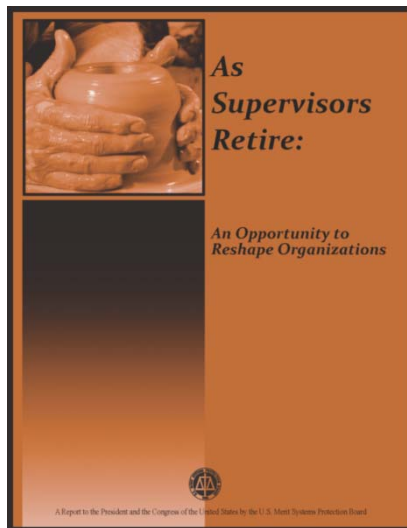


What We Did



What We Did

- Literature review
- Surveys
- Analysis
- Reports



What We Found:

Background and Selection Practices



Insight: A Changed Workforce

Statistic	1983	1995	2007
Women	38%	43%	43%
Minority	25%	29%	33%
Average Age	42.4 yrs	44.3 yrs	47.0 yrs
Professional/Administrative	39%	52%	61%
Trades (blue-collar)	21%	15%	11%
General Schedule (1)	98%	94%	78%
Average Salary	\$24,323	\$41,326	\$68,439
Adjusted Average Salary (2)	\$55,156	\$60,615	\$68,439

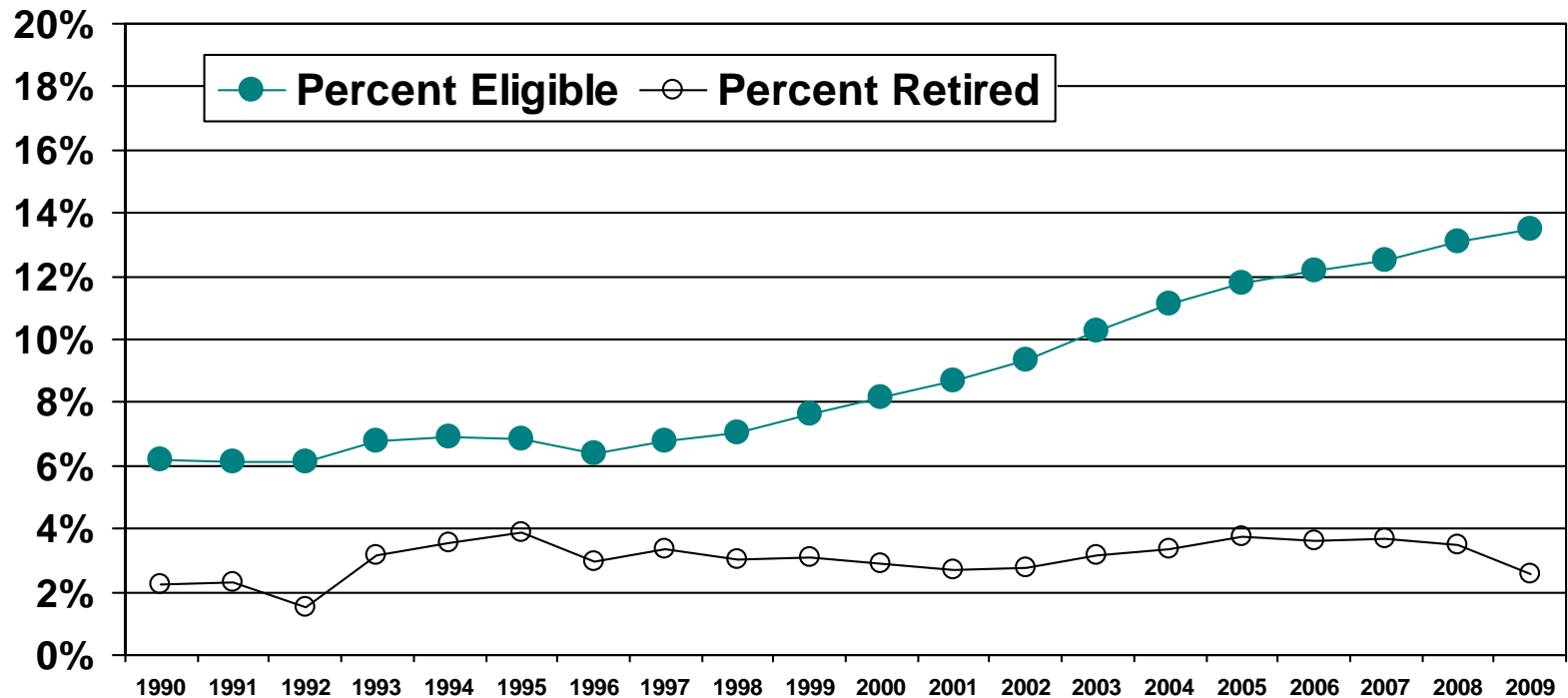
Source: Central Personnel Data File. Data for permanent full-time employees.

(1) Percent of white-collar employees covered by the General Schedule or a similar pay system.

(2) Salaries for 1983 and 1995 adjusted to 2007 levels using the Employment Cost Index.



Federal Employee Retirement Trends, 1990-2009

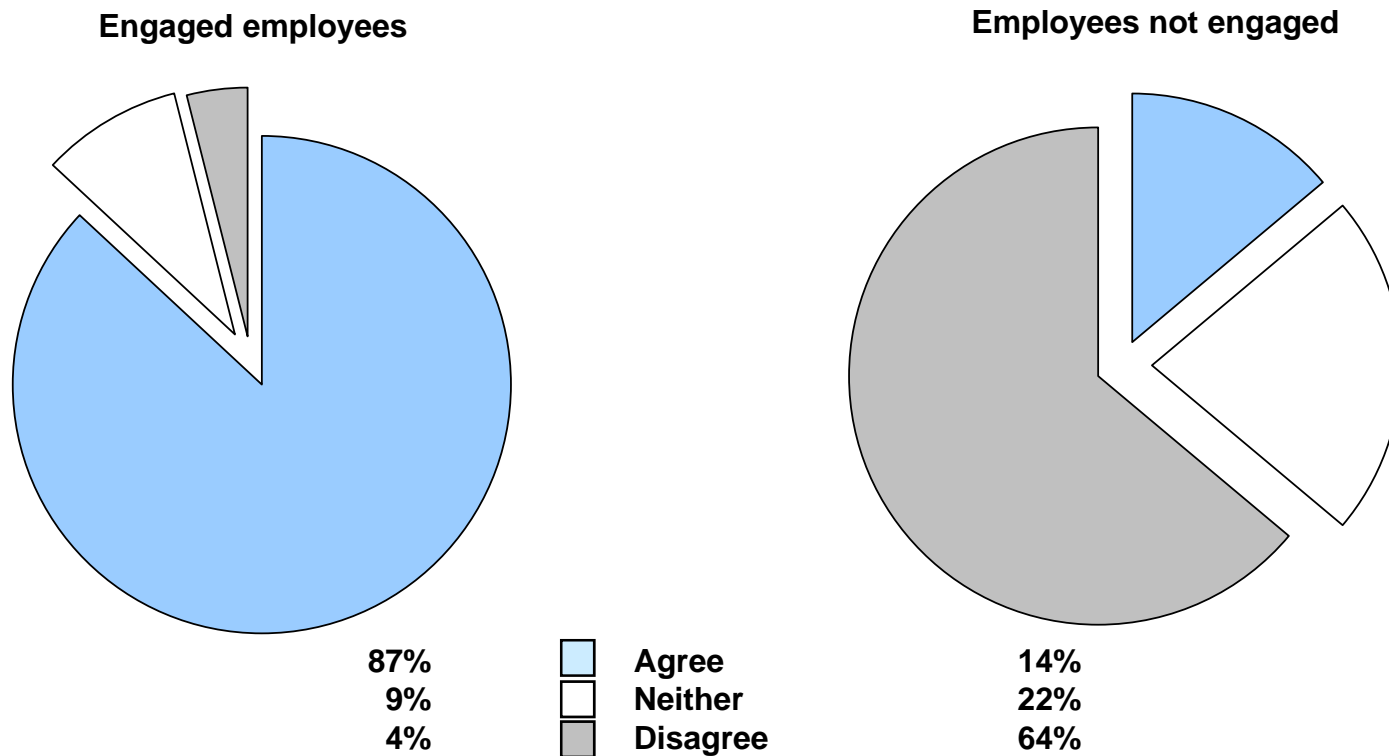


Source: MSPB estimate using data from OPM's Central Personnel Data File.
Estimate for Executive Branch permanent full-time employees (FBI excluded).
Eligibility based on employment at the end of the preceding fiscal year (September 30).



Supervision and Engagement

My supervisor has good management skills:



Source: 2005 Merit Principles Survey.



Issue: Roles and Realities

- Conflicting views: “Layer” vs. “Leader”
- Limited time available
 - Strategy tends to be secondary
 - Short-term overshadows long-term
- Limited support for supervisors
 - Training
 - HR—staff and systems
 - Leadership—guidance and support



Recruitment and Selection

- Supervision often underemphasized
 - Little information in announcements
 - Focus on technical competencies
- Assessment
 - Reliance on training and experience
 - Role of secondary assessments unclear
 - More geared to pool than position?



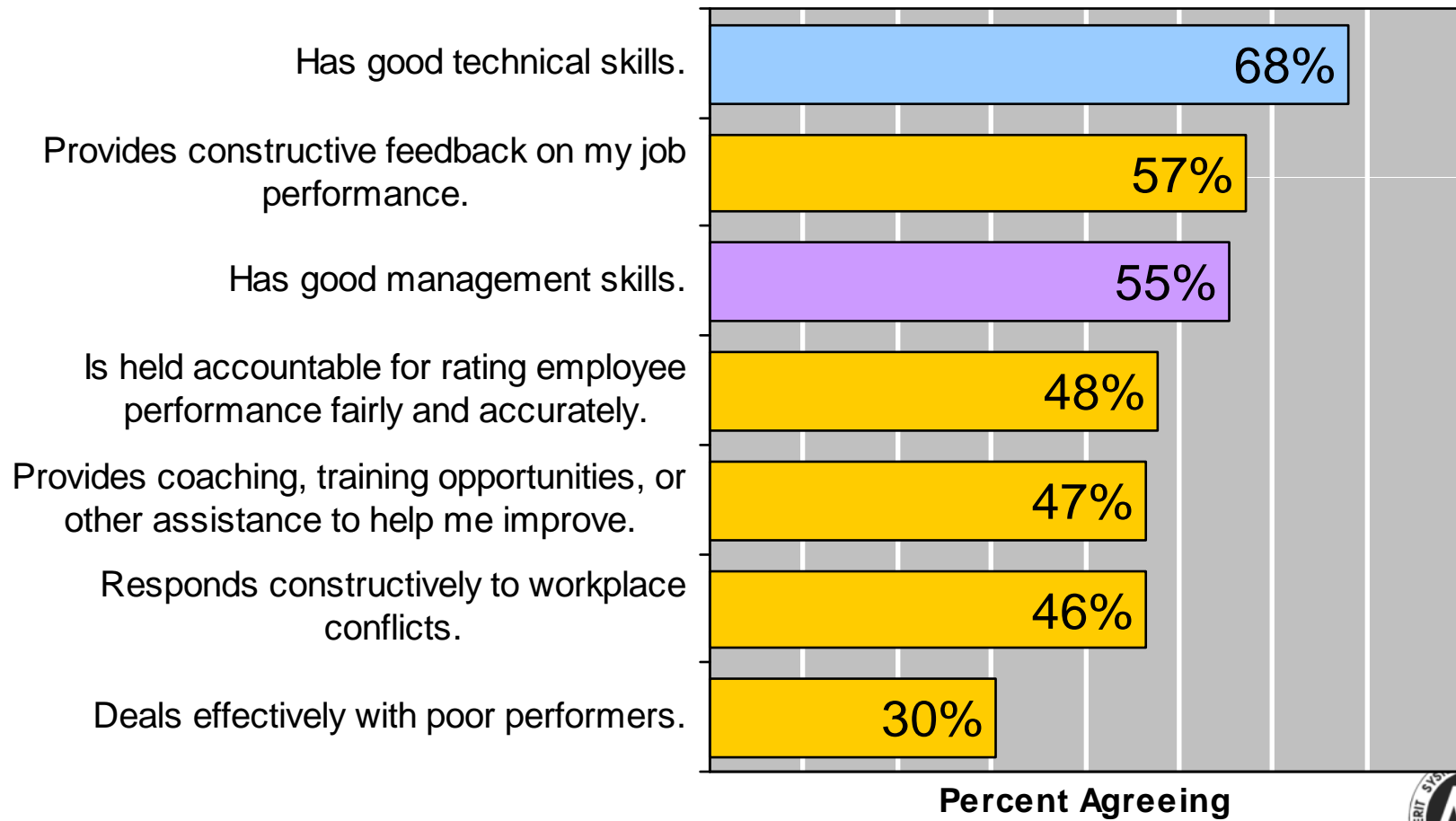
What We Found:

Perceived Skills and Performance



Issue: Supervisory Skills and Accountability

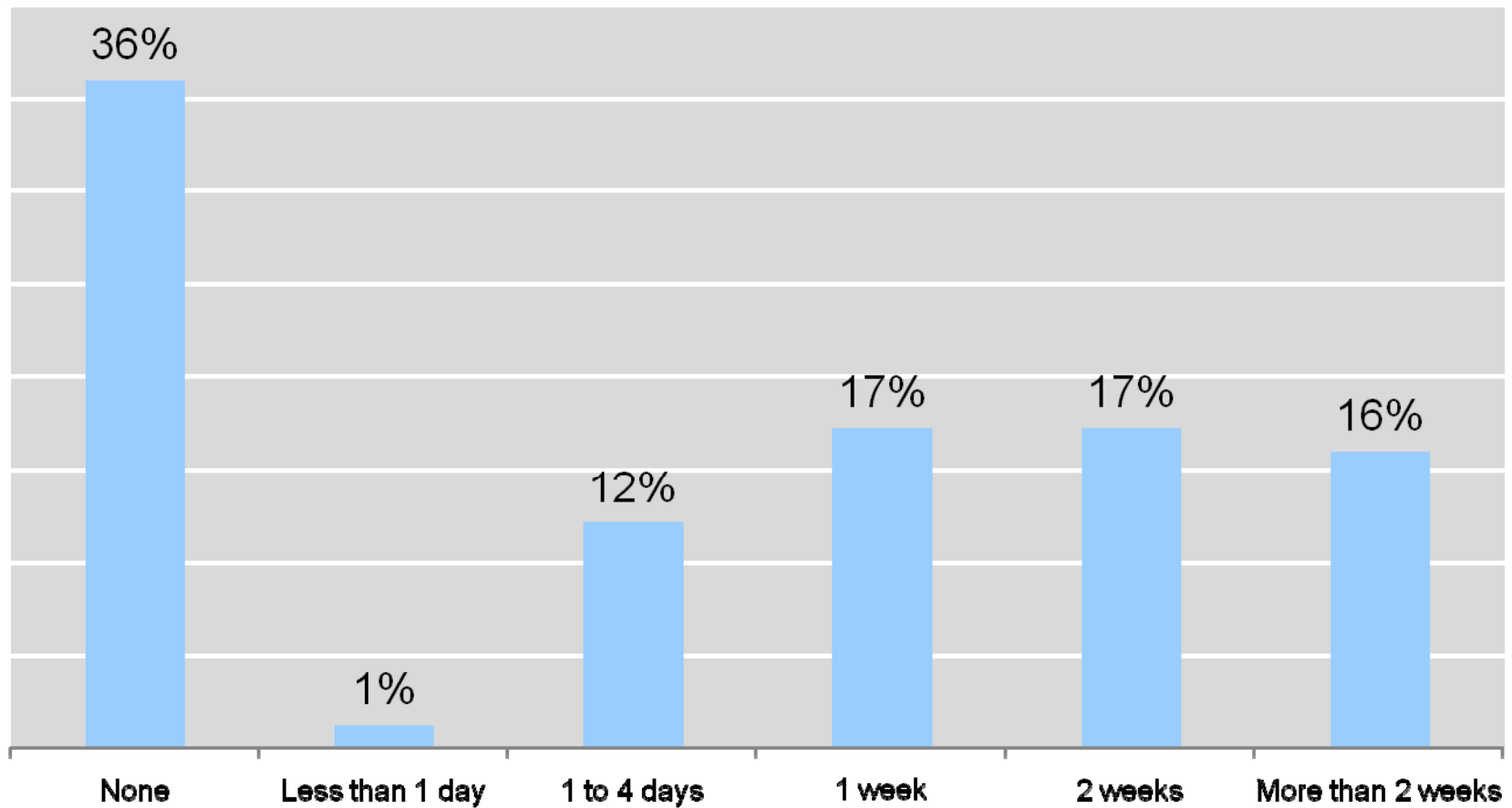
My supervisor...



Source: 2005 Merit Principles Survey.

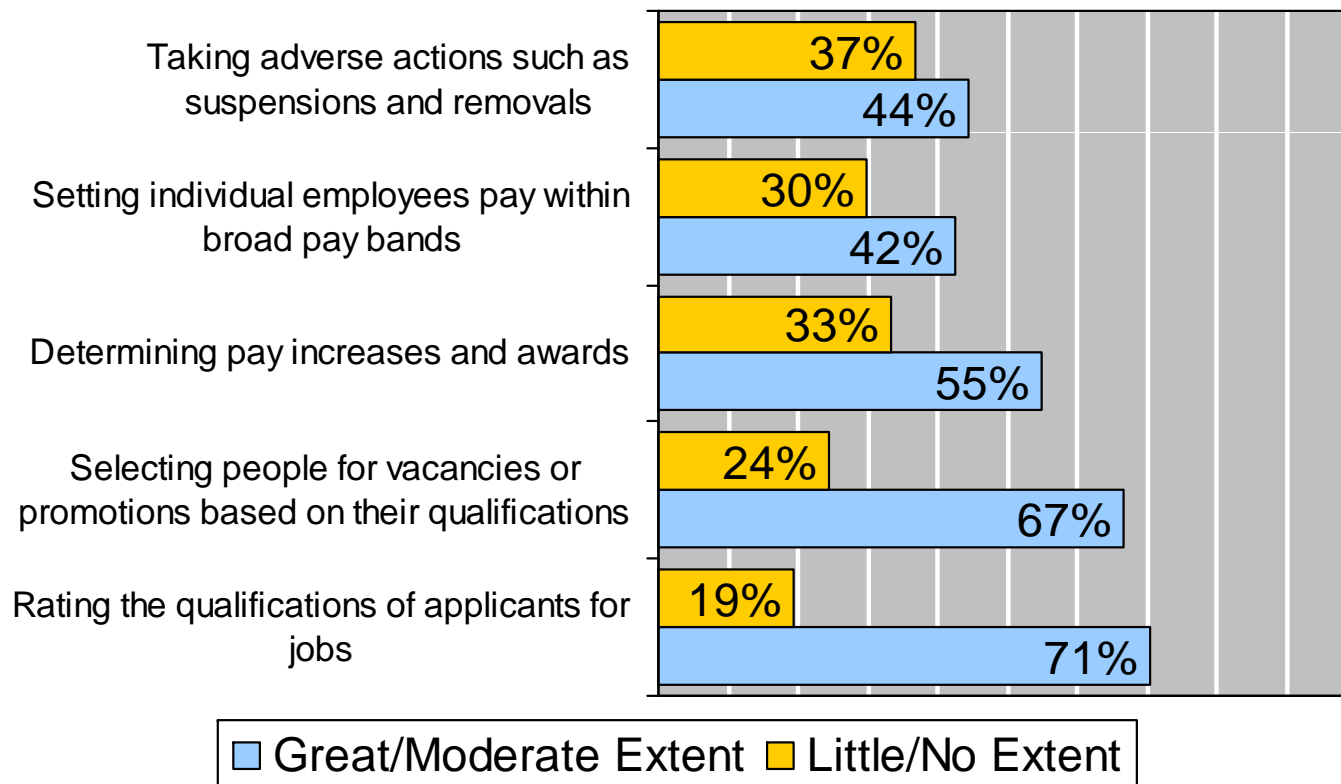


Initial Training Received by Supervisors



Issue: Confidence in “High Stakes” Decisions

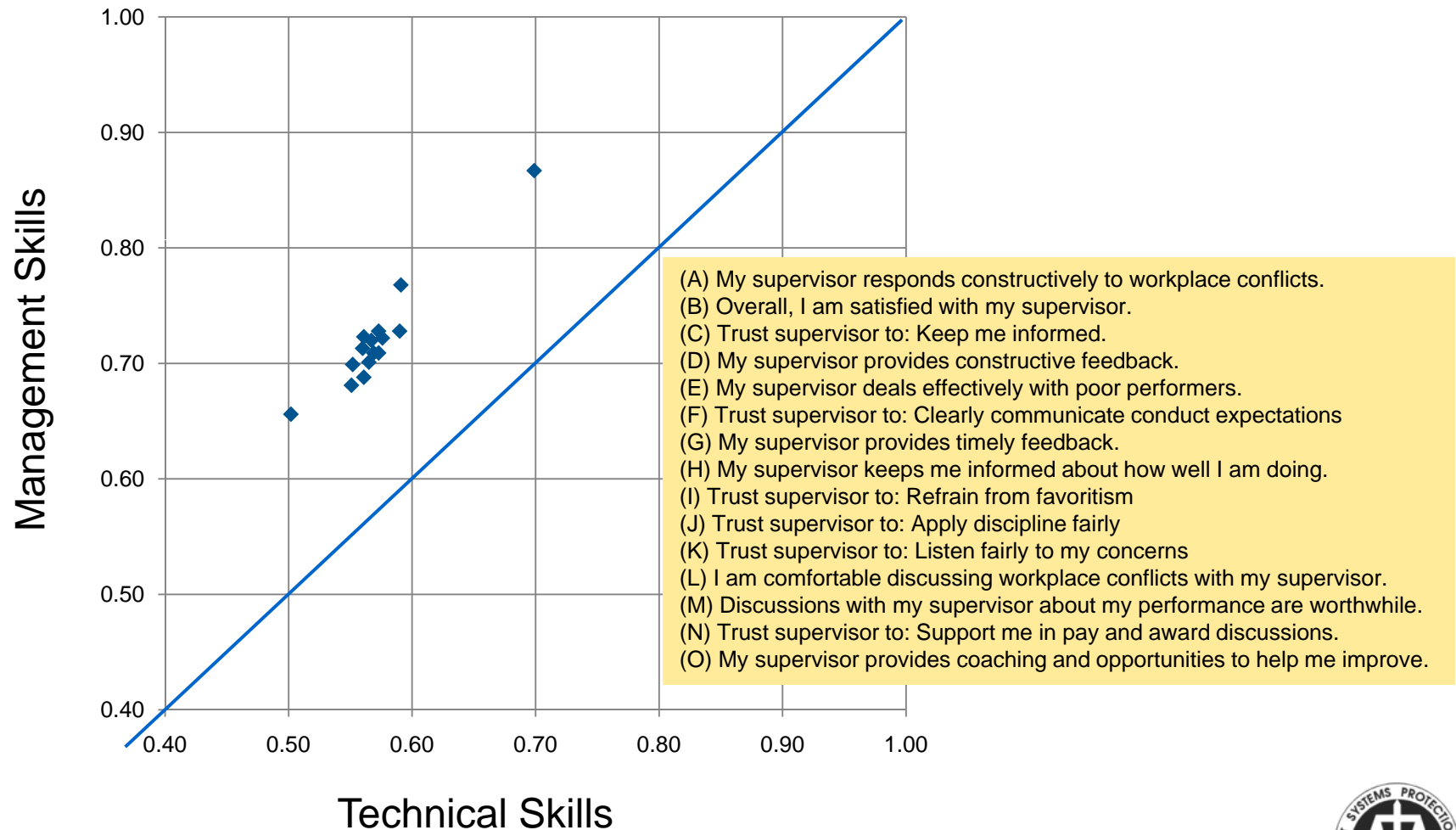
To what extent do you think your supervisor will exercise the following authorities in a fair and effective manner?



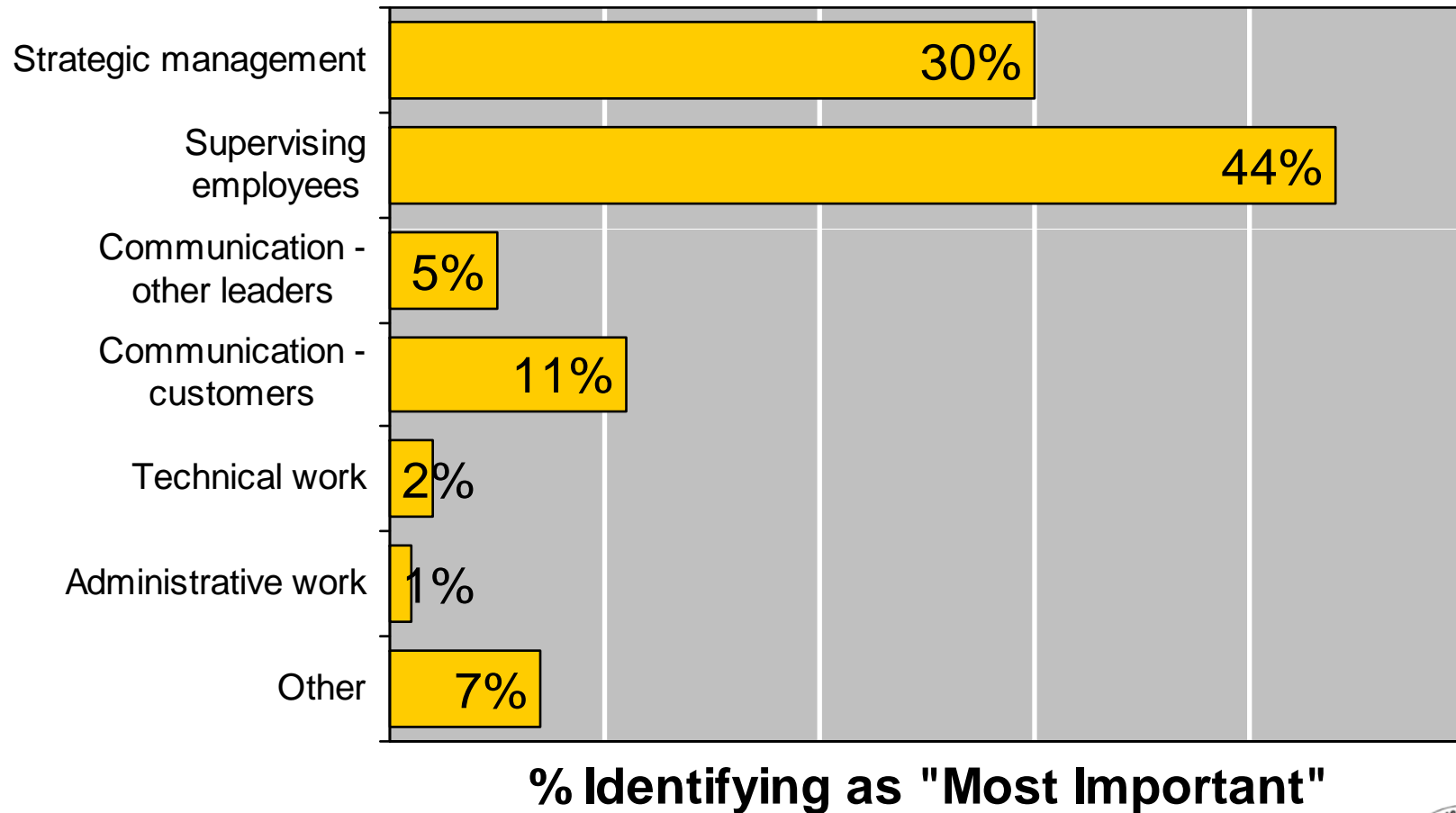
Source: 2005 Merit Principles Survey. Responses of “Don’t Know/Can’t Judge” are not shown.



Correlations: Perceived Skills and Satisfaction



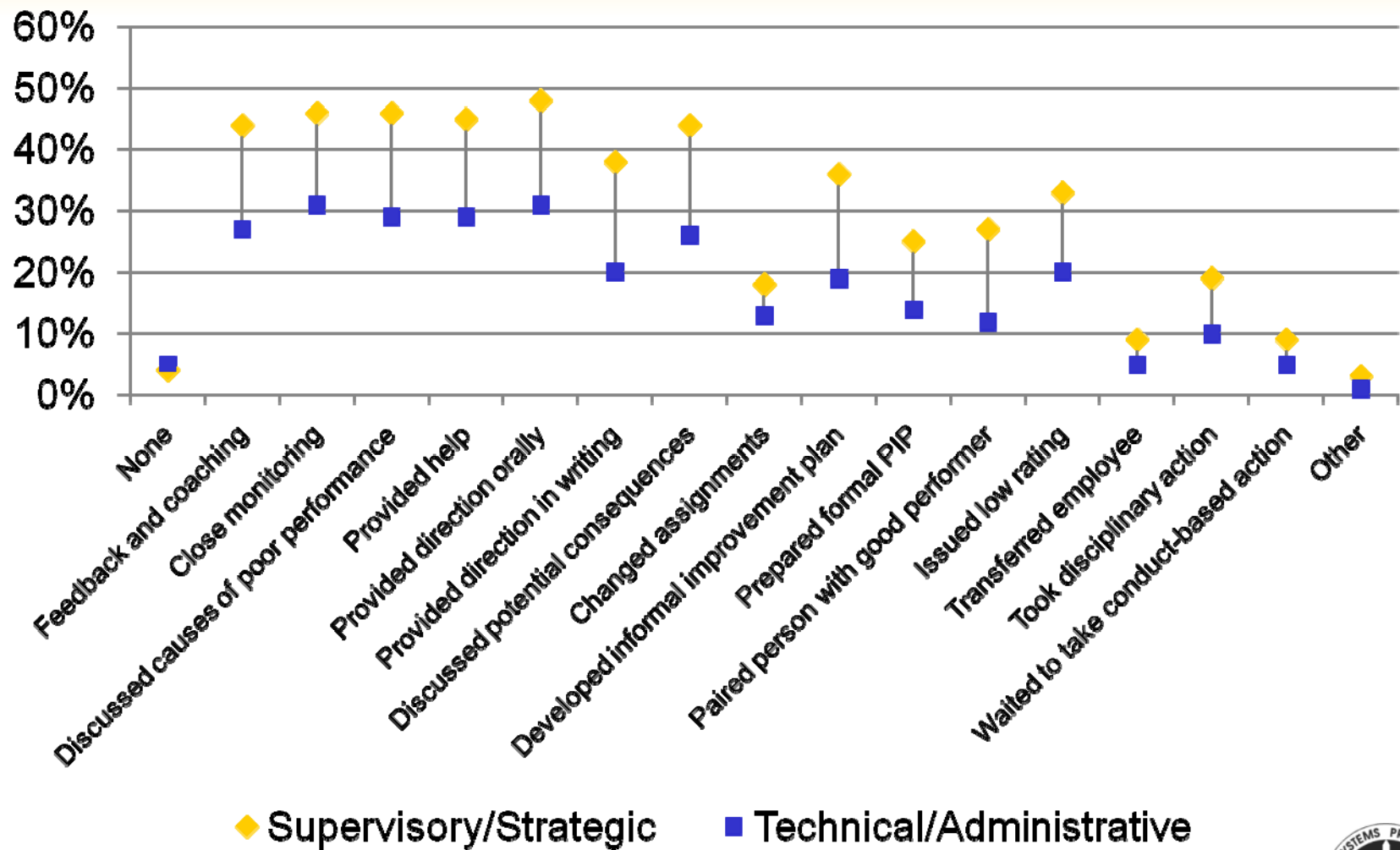
Insight and Issue: First-Level Supervisory Roles



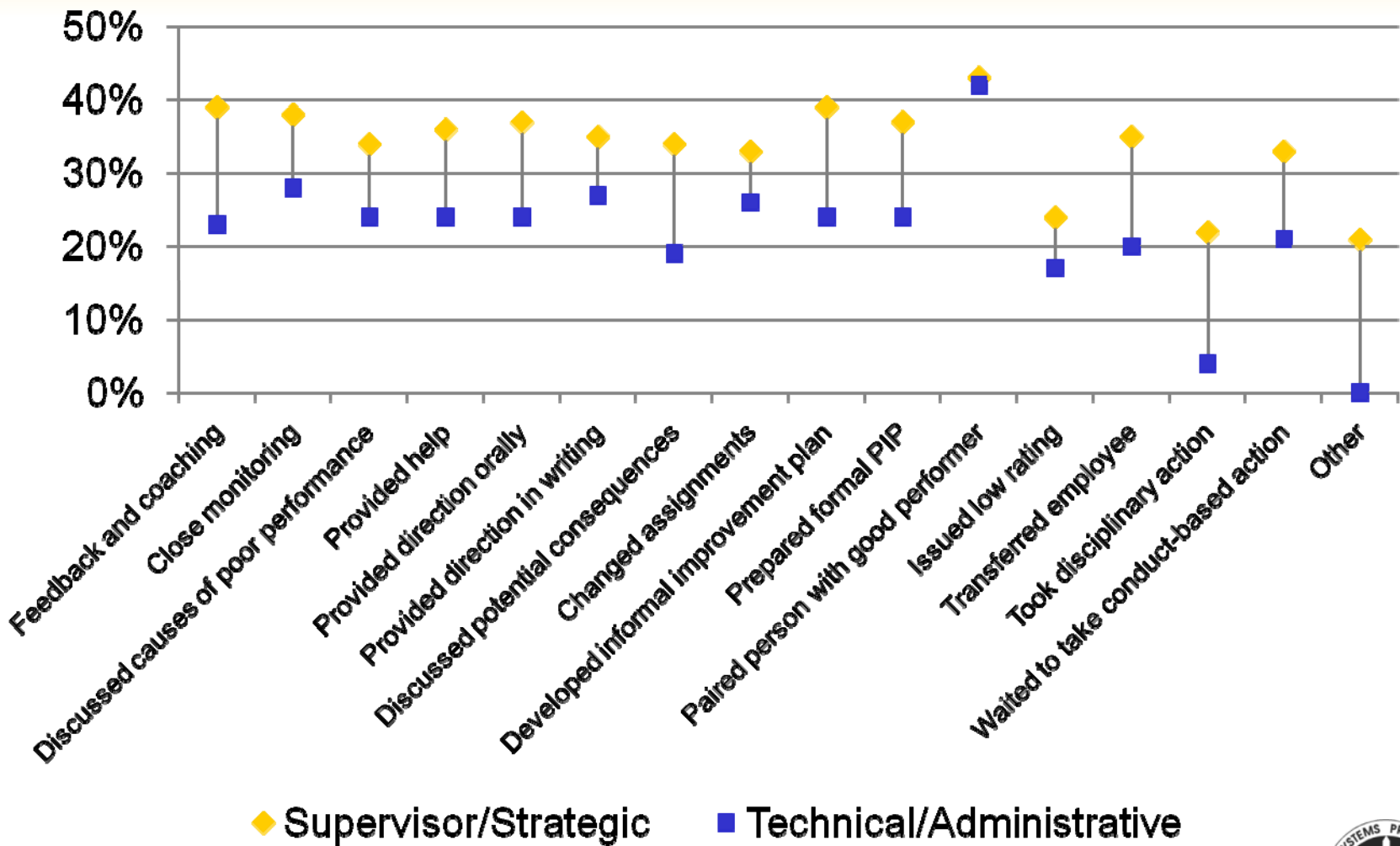
Source: U.S. MSPB, 2007 Merit Principles Survey.



Insight: Role and Response to Poor Performance



Insight: Effectiveness of Response to Poor Performance



Percentage of respondents taking action who indicated that the employee 's performance improved.



Lessons Learned:

Ideas for Practitioners



Lesson Learned: Competency Models

- A representation of reality
- Communicate with care
 - Weights
 - Implications for assessment
 - Implications for selection



Illustration: Models and Messages

ECQ1: Leading Change	Creativity and Innovation External Awareness Flexibility Resilience Strategic Thinking Vision
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ECQ 2: Leading People	Conflict Management Leveraging Diversity Developing Others Team Building
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ECQ 3: Results Driven	Accountability Customer Service Decisiveness Entrepreneurship Problem Solving Technical Credibility
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ECQ 4: Business Acumen	Financial Management Human Capital Management Technology Management
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ECQ 5: Building Coalitions	Partnering Political Savvy Influencing/Negotiating
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Adapted from the Executive Core Qualifications for the Federal Government's Senior Executive Service (SES).
Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management; available at <http://www.opm.gov/ses/recruitment/ecq.asp>.

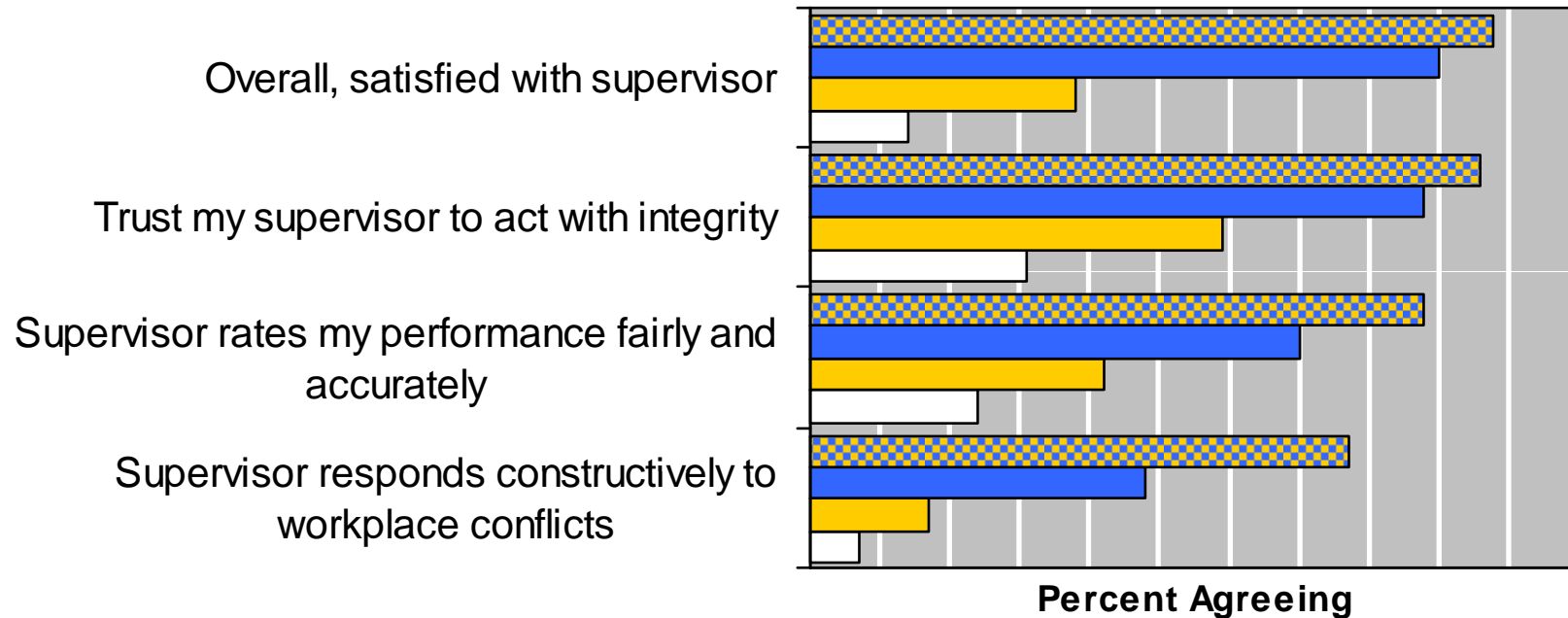


Lesson Learned: Technical Credibility

- Foundational – “more equal”
- Distinct – “closer to orthogonal”
- Used in concert with other competencies
- Importance – “not a constant”
 - Depends on level
 - Depends on mission and functions
 - Depends on organizational structure and capacity



Insight: Supervisory Skills and Effectiveness



- Good management and good technical skills**
- Good management skills only**
- Good technical skills only**
- Neither**

Source: 2005 Merit Principles Survey.



New and Improved Packaging?

Managerial and Leadership Competencies

Supervisor

Manager

Executive

Technical Competence

Technical Credibility



Lesson Learned: Perspectives

- Different perspectives may persuade
- Survey data can help
 - Validate (or challenge) I/O insights
 - Show consequences of (in)competencies
 - “Reality check” on leader’s beliefs



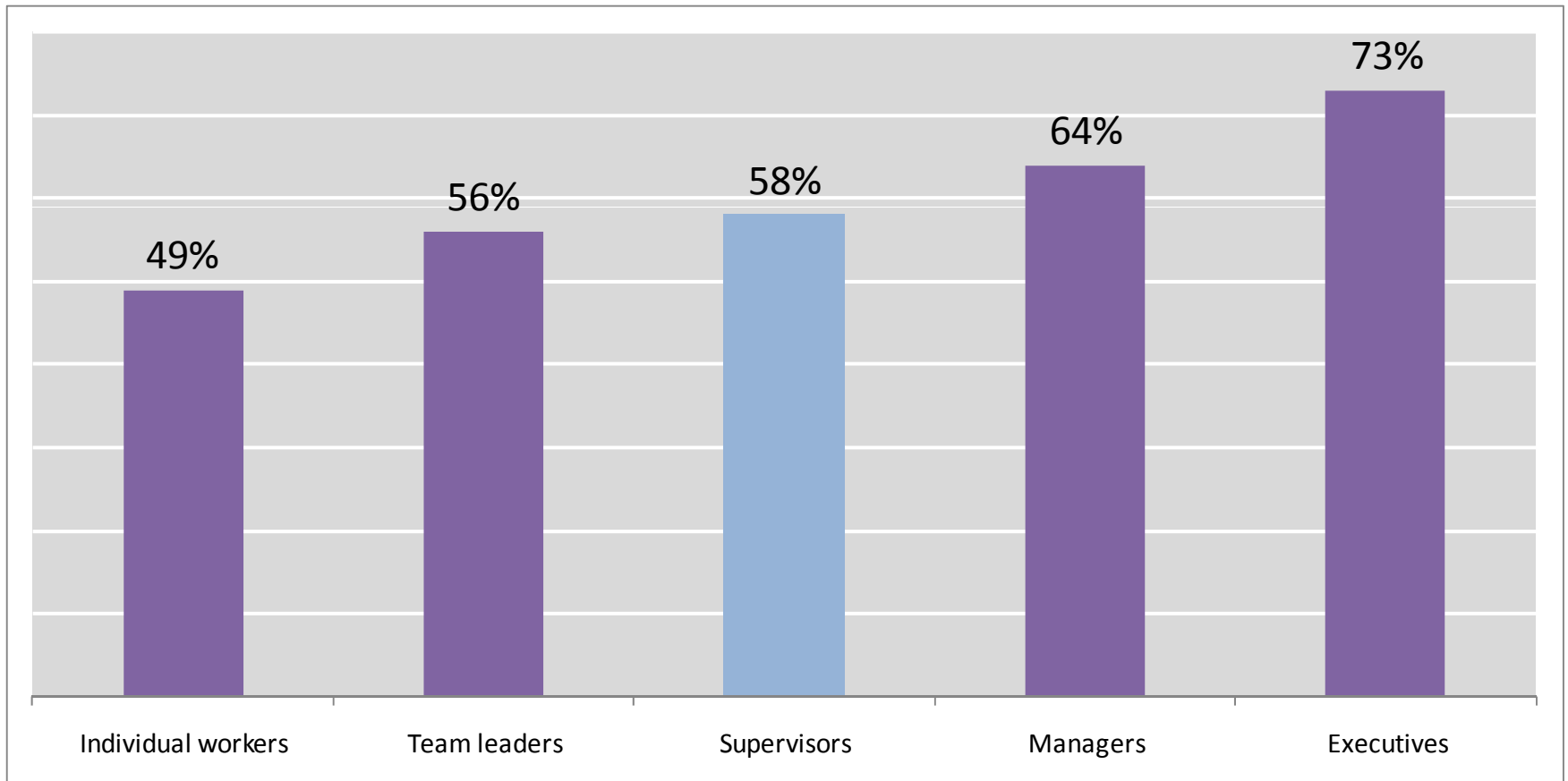
Behavior: Supervisor and Employee Perspectives

Question (response)	Supervisors ("I do this")	Nonsupervisors ("My supervisor does this")
Talk with employees and assist them when they need help	99%	73%
Explain work changes before they take place	94%	56%
Employees in my work unit can express their point of view without fear of negative consequences	99%	41%



Issue: Accountability

I am rewarded for providing high-quality products and services.



Lesson Learned: Changing Practice

- Technical competence can dominate the discussion and the decision
 - “Objective”
 - Past practice
 - “Rocket science”
 - Assumption of transferability



What can be done?



Issues in the Management of Supervisors

Planning

- Conception of role
- Span of control
- Authority

Recruitment

- Job analysis
- Competency requirements
- Job preview
- Advertising

Selection

- Assessment methods
- Selection criteria
- “Probationary period”

Accountability

- Expectations
- Culture
- Consequences

Support and Guidance

- Initial training
- Information and communication
- Feedback
- Development

Development

- Initial training
- “People management” skills
- Continuing education



Information, Guidance, and Support

Question (response)	Result
Workload is reasonable (agree)	60%
Have resources needed to do job well (agree)	65%
Have authority needed to fulfill responsibilities (agree)	65%
Supervisor explains the reasons for work changes before they take place (agree)	51%
Receive information from management about what's going on in the organization (satisfied)	51%
Receive information and guidance needed to do work effectively (most of the time/always)	61%
Receive formal or informal feedback from supervisor (every 2 weeks or more often)	49%



Improving Supervision: What's in *Your* Program?

Planning

- Focus on leadership
- Allot commensurate time and authority
- Create a pipeline

Recruitment

- Do a job analysis
- Give supervision due weight
- Provide job previews
- Truth in advertising

Selection

- Limit reliance on T&E
- Select for a *supervisory* position
- Use the probationary period

Accountability

- Take performance management seriously
- Consider “people management” – not just production
- Establish consequences – positive and negative

Support and Guidance

- Keep supervisors “in the loop”
- Help supervisors learn and improve
- Managers: lead by example

Development

- Provide sufficient, timely initial training
- Focus on “people management” skills
- Emphasize continuing education – don’t “train and forget”



For More Information

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