# THE POWER OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

**Developing & Improving a Federal Employee Engagement Scale**

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**U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board**

- **Background**
  **What is MSPB and why did we study engagement?**

- **What engages Federal employees?**

- **Who is engaged?**

- **Why is engagement important?**

- **Employee perceptions of engagement drivers**

- **Recommendations to improve engagement**

**An independent agency that ensures all Federal Government agencies follow merit system practices:**

1. Recruit, select, advance on merit after fair and open competition
2. Treat employees and applicants fairly and equitably
3. Provide equal pay for equal work and reward excellent performance
4. Maintain high standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest
5. Manage employees efficiently and effectively

6. Retain or separate employees on the basis of their performance
7. Educate and train employees if it will result in better organizational or individual performance
8. Protect employees from improper political influence
9. Protect employees against reprisal for the lawful disclosure of information in whistleblower situations

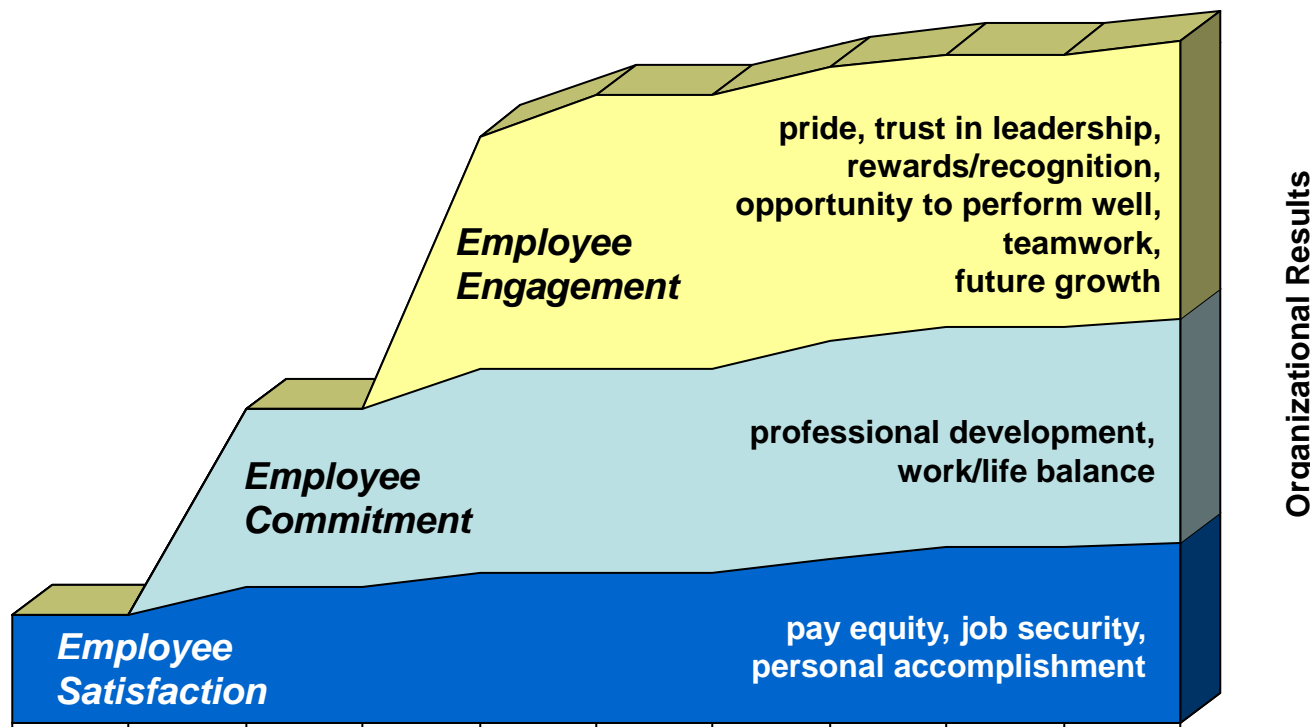# U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

**MSPB ensures that agencies follow merit systems practices by:**

- **Adjudicating Federal employee appeals of agency personnel actions**

- **Conducting special reviews and studies of Federal merit systems**

  Recent study topics include: hiring upper level employees from outside Government, implications of using various hiring authorities, use of alternative discipline in Federal agencies, longitudinal analysis of prior MSPB surveys, and Federal employee engagement

# What is Employee Engagement?

**A heightened connection to: an organization, the work itself, or the people we work for or with**

**Employee Engagement**

pride, trust in leadership, rewards/recognition, opportunity to perform well, teamwork, future growth

**Employee Commitment**

professional development, work/life balance

**Employee Satisfaction**

pay equity, job security, personal accomplishment

Organizational Results

4

# Why is Employee Engagement Important?

- **Previous studies in the private sector have found a relationship between increased employee engagement and better financial performance**

    **For example: Corporate Leadership Council, Towers Perrin, Gallup**

- **Continuing battle to attract and retain talented employees**

# Why is Employee Engagement Important?

**MSPB findings are focused on outcomes.**

**The engagement level of a Federal agency's workforce is significantly correlated to the following outcomes:**

- Agency results

- Amount of sick leave used by employees

- Equal employment opportunity complaint activity

- Time missed due to workplace injury or illness

# Employee Engagement Study Background

**The study is based on data from the Merit Principles Survey 2005 (MPS 2005)**

- **Administered in 2005**

- **24 Federal agencies**

- **36,926 full-time, permanent employees responded**

**Factor analysis of MPS 2005 survey data**

- Statistical procedure used to discover patterns in data sets

- Based on a literature review we determined that one factor could be labeled an "employee engagement" factor

- Isolate a manageable, representative set of items from this factor to use as a scale to measure employee engagement

**Scale reliability and validity**

- **Four different scales were tested based on the employee engagement factor to see which was most reliable and valid**

- **Reliability: Coefficient alpha = .926**

- **Content validity: Literature review**

- **Construct validity: Correlation of scale to internal (MPS 2005) markers and external agency measures**

The employee engagement scale consists of 16 questions within 6 broad areas that we found engage Federal Employees:

1. Pride in one's work or workplace
2. Satisfaction with leadership
3. Opportunity to perform well at work
4. Satisfaction with recognition received
5. Prospect for future personal growth
6. Positive work environment / teamwork

# What Engages Federal Employees?

## 1. Pride in one's work or workplace

Engagement Scale Questions (MPS 2005):

- My agency is successful in accomplishing its mission.

- I would recommend my agency as a place to work.

- The work I do is meaningful to me.

- My work unit produces high quality products and services.

## 2. Satisfaction with leadership

Engagement Scale Questions (MPS 2005):

- Overall, I am satisfied with my supervisor.

- Overall, I am satisfied with managers above my immediate supervisor.

## 3. Opportunity to perform well at work

Engagement Scale Questions (MPS 2005):

- I know what is expected of me on the job.

- My job makes good use of my skills and abilities.

- I have the resources to do my job well.

- I have sufficient opportunities (such as challenging assignments or projects) to earn a high performance rating.

**4. Satisfaction with recognition received**

Engagement Scale Questions (MPS 2005):

- Recognition and rewards are based on performance in my work unit.

- I am satisfied with the recognition and awards I receive for my work.

## 5. Prospect for future personal growth

Engagement Scale Questions (MPS 2005):

- I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.

**6. Positive work environment / teamwork**

Engagement Scale Questions (MPS 2005):

- I am treated with respect at work.

- My opinions count at work.

- A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work unit.

# Scoring methodology
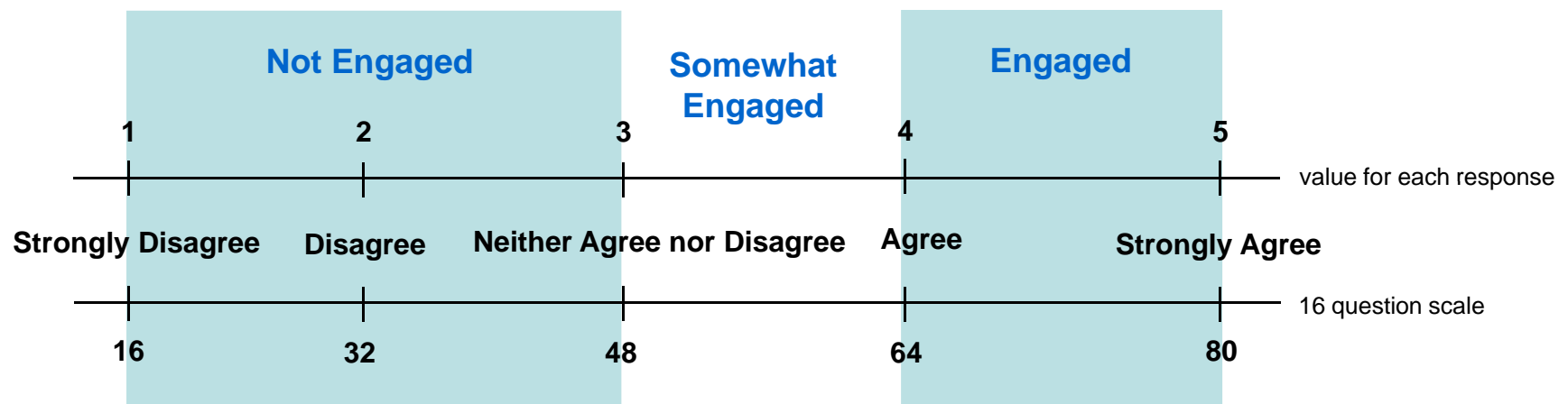
# Engagement and the Federal Workforce

## What percentage of Federal employees are engaged?

Not Engaged 18%

Engaged 35%

Somewhat Engaged 47%

18
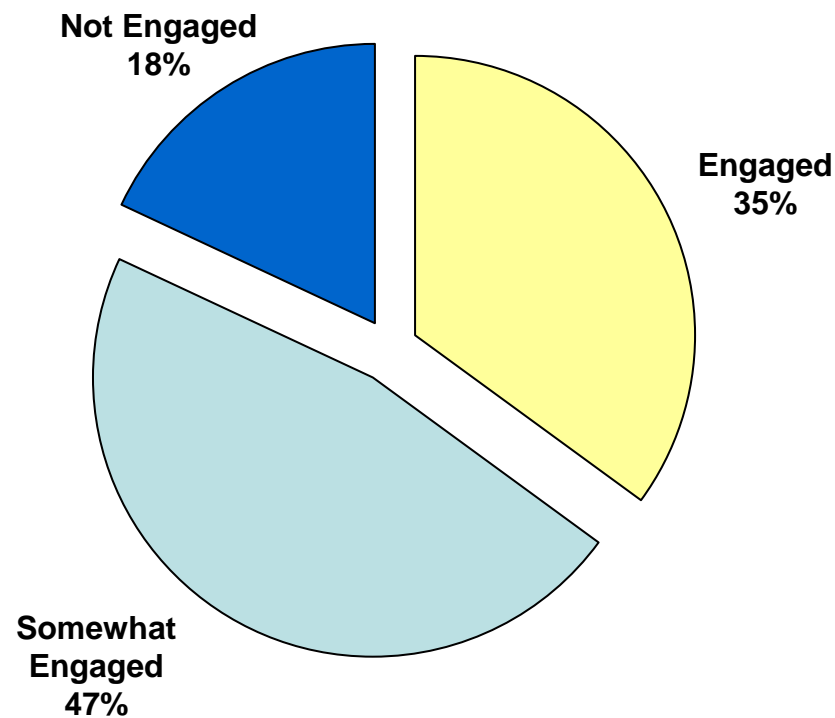
# Engagement and the Federal Workforce

## Organizational Responsibility Level
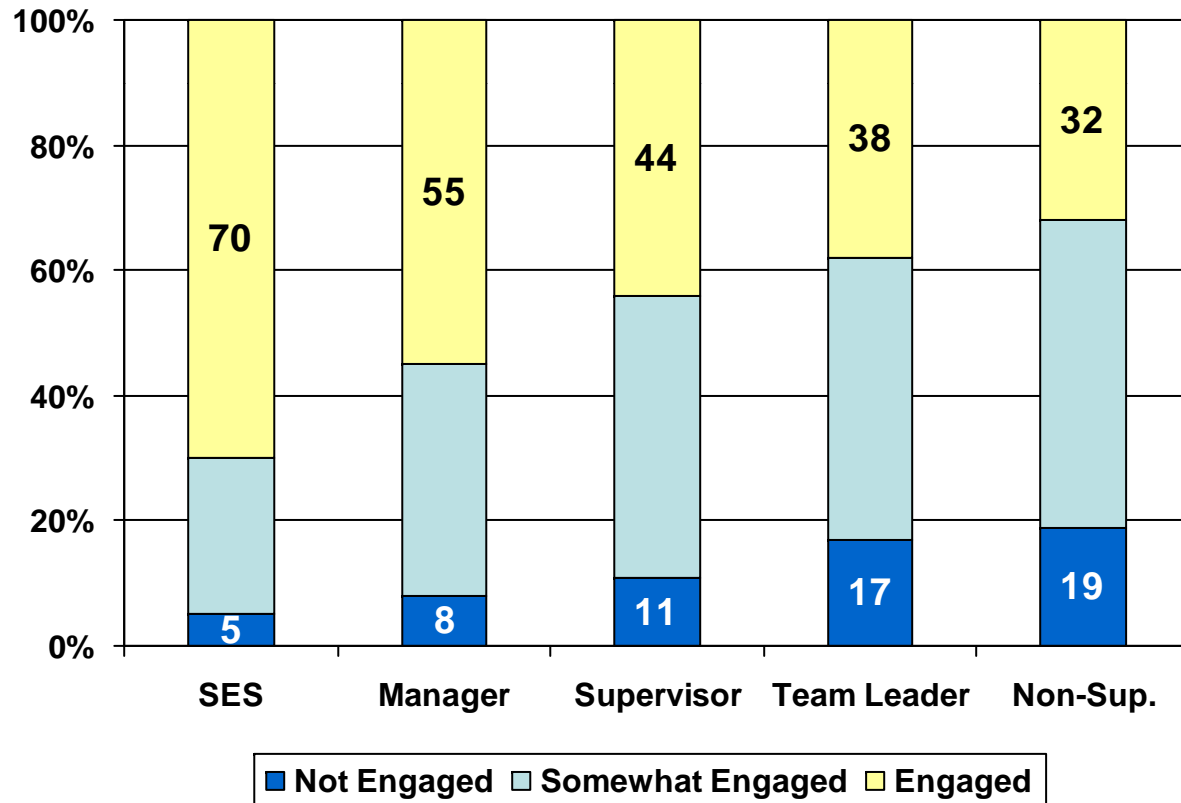
# Engagement and the Federal Workforce

## Education Level
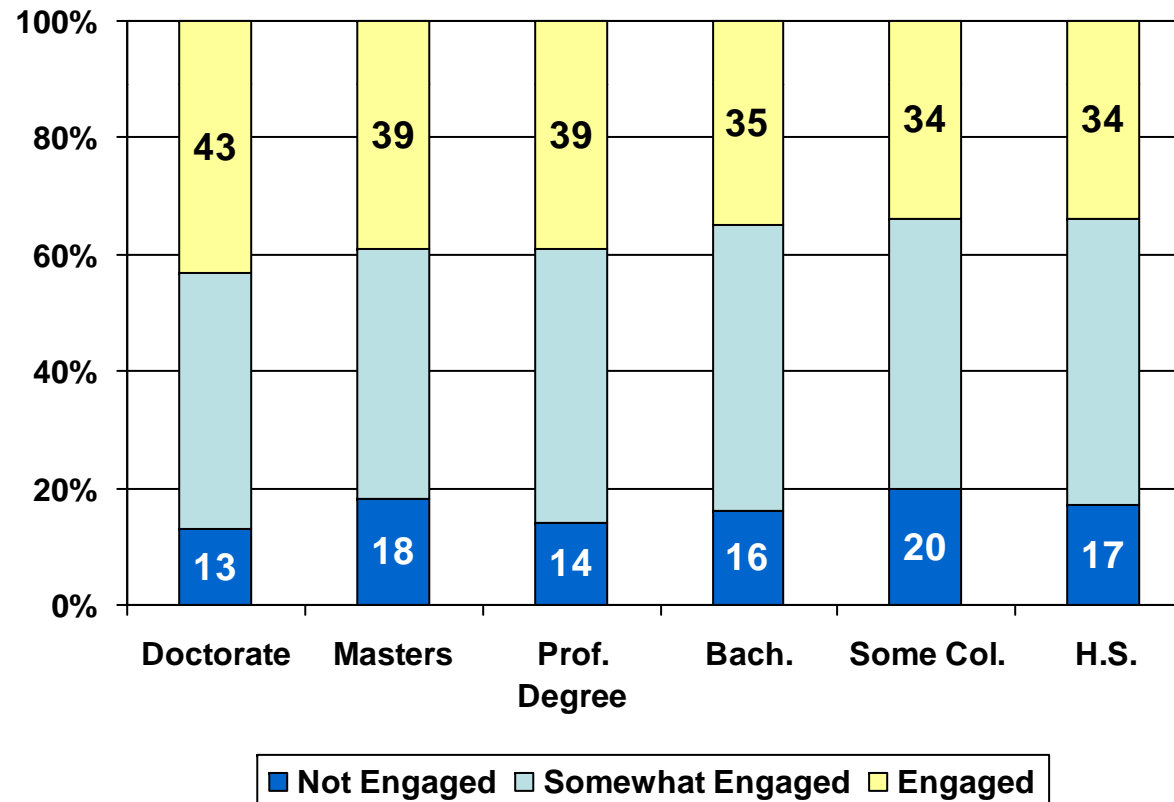
# Engagement and the Federal Workforce

**Other factors and engagement**

**Little difference was found between levels of employee engagement based on:**

- Gender
- Age
- Occupation category
- Civil service tenure
- Headquarters or field

# Engagement and the Federal Workforce

## There are significant agency differences
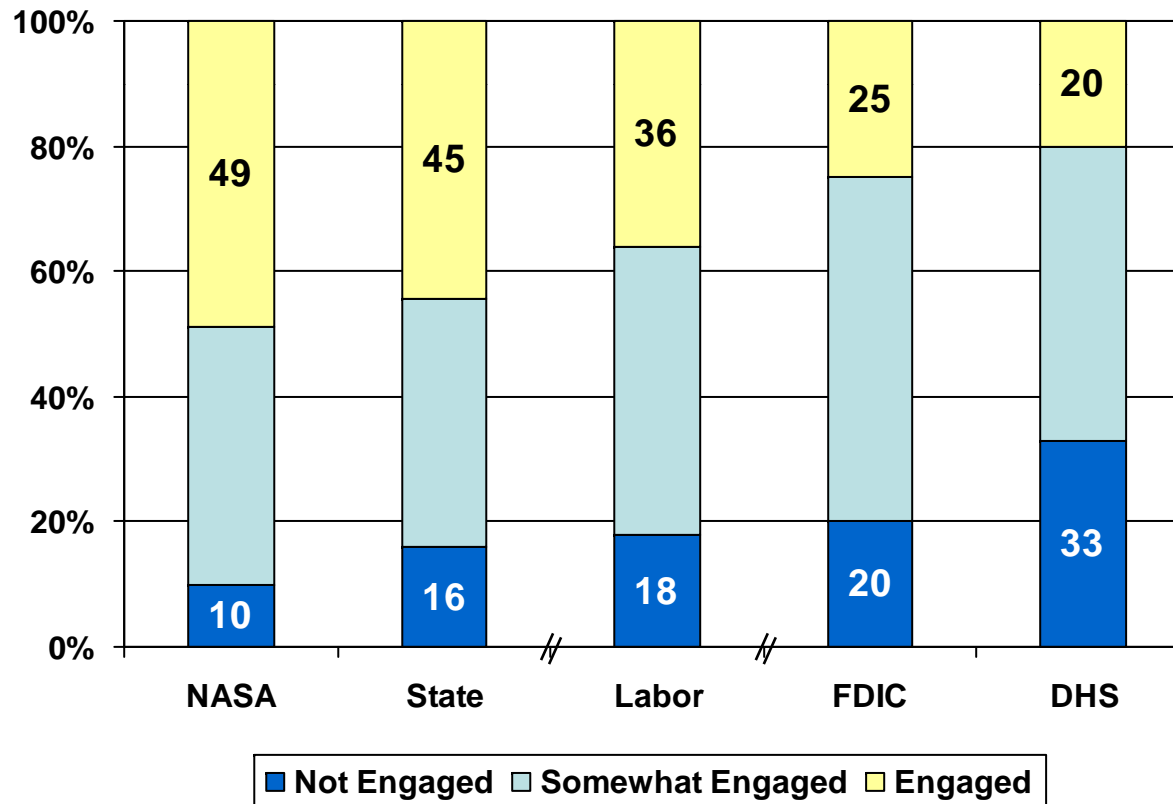
# Engagement and Federal Agency Outcomes

The engagement level of a Federal agency's workforce is significantly correlated to:

- Results (as measured by OMB's PART process)

- Amount of sick leave used by employees

- Equal employment opportunity complaint activity

- Time missed due to workplace injury or illness

# Engagement and Federal Agency Outcomes

## Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)

- Consistent assessment of Federal program results administered by the Office of Management and Budget

- Are programs meeting their annual and long-term performance goals?

- Assesses whether the program compares favorably to other similar programs

# Engagement and Federal Agency Outcomes

## PART Results Section average scores
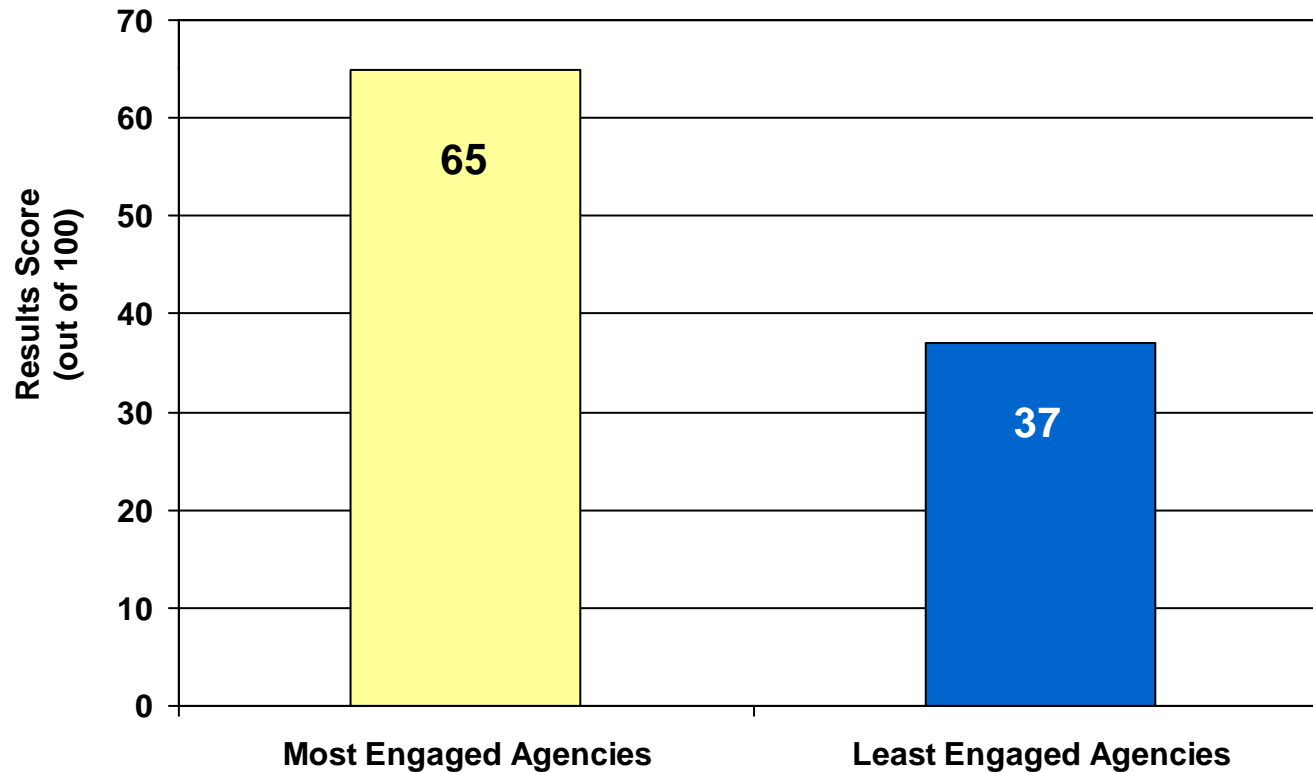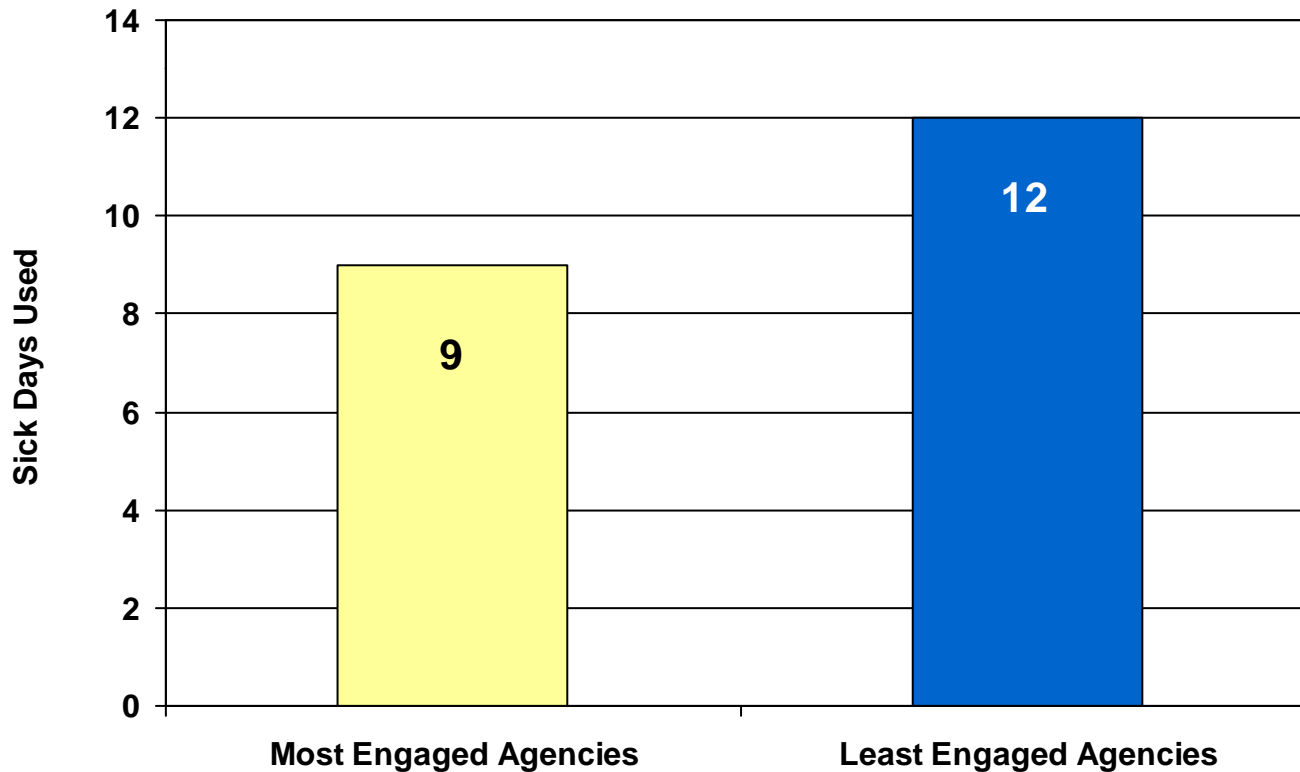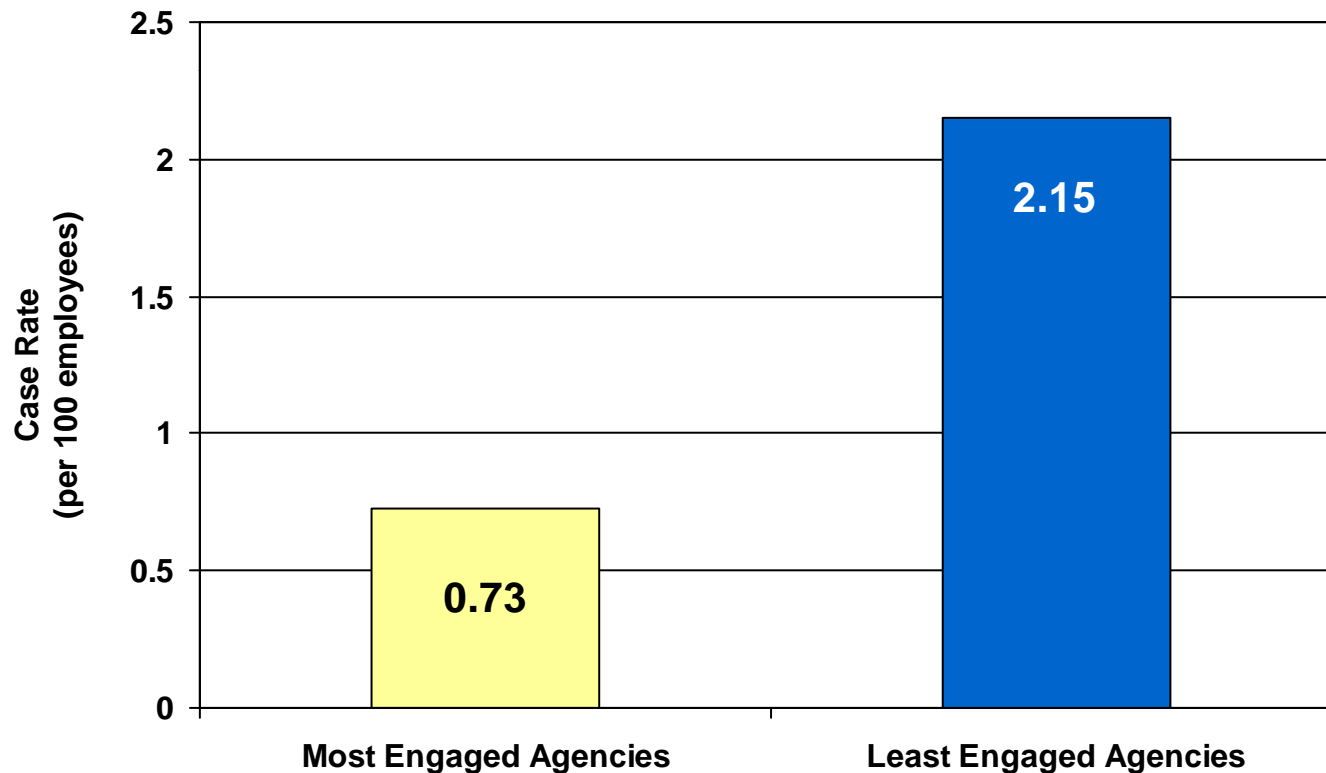
# Engagement and Federal Agency Outcomes

## Average number of EEO complaints
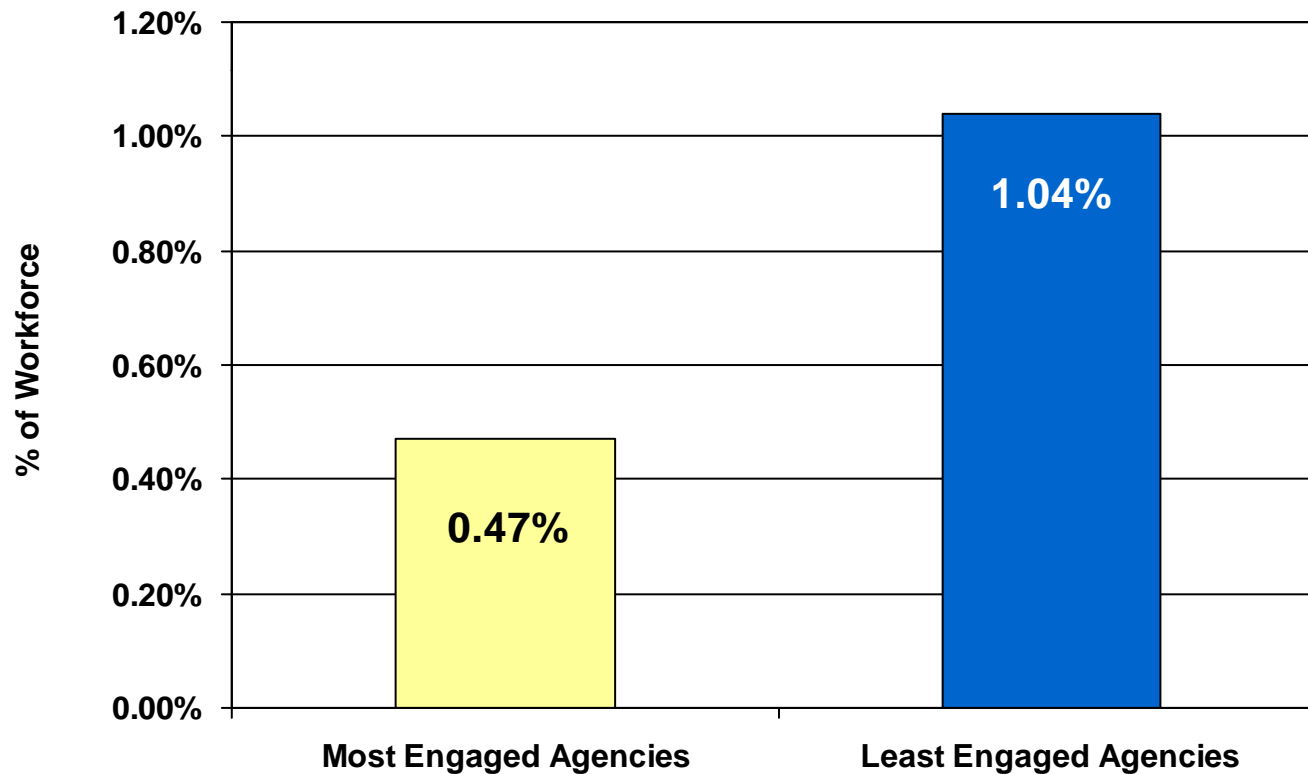
# Engagement and Federal Agency Outcomes

## Average rate of lost time cases due to workplace injury or illness
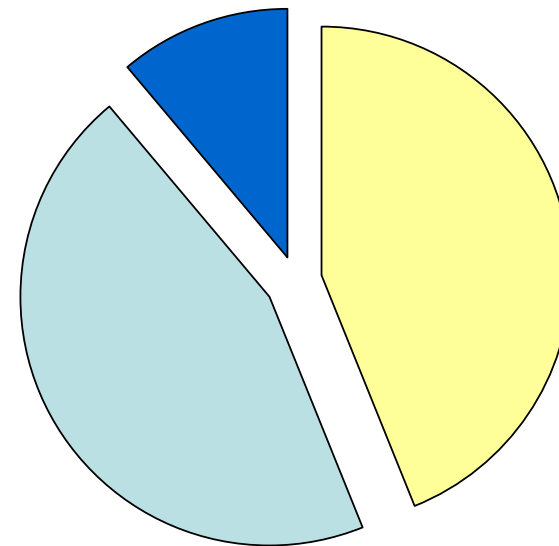
**Among employees NOT ELIGIBLE to retire:**

**How likely is it that you will leave your agency in the next year?**
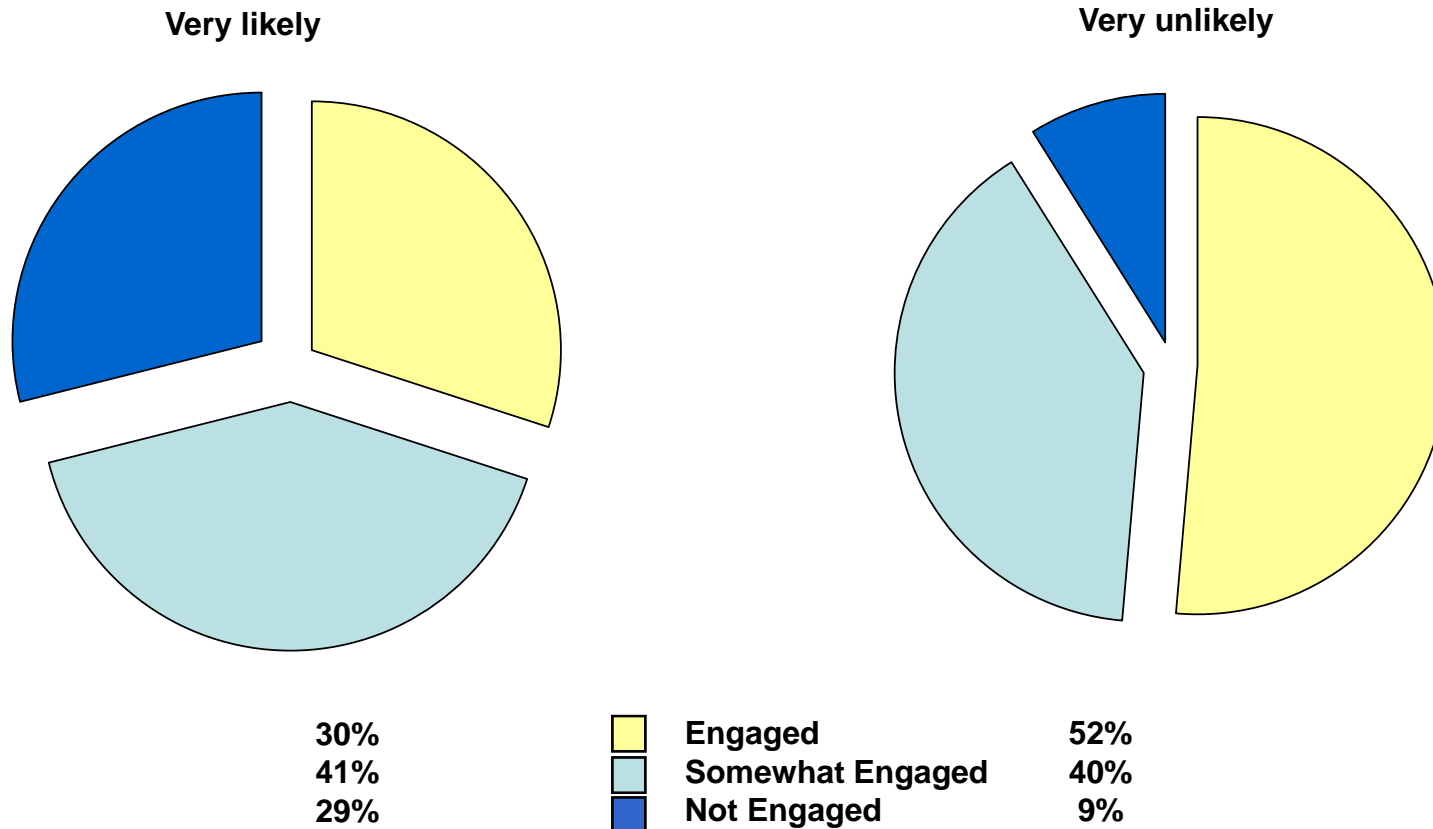


**Very likely**

**Very unlikely**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 17% | Engaged | 44% |
| 36% | Somewhat Engaged | 45% |
| 47% | Not Engaged | 11% |
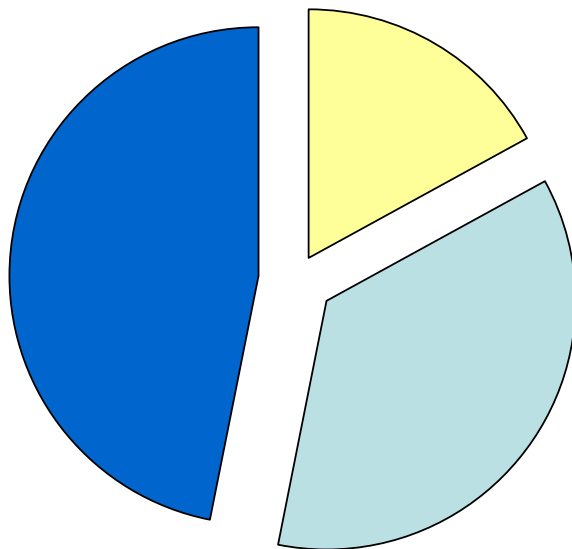
**Among employees ELIGIBLE to retire:**

**How likely is it that you will leave your agency in the next year?**

**Very likely**

**Very unlikely**

| 30% | | Engaged | 52% |
|-----|--|---------|-----|
| 41% | | Somewhat Engaged | 40% |
| 29% | | Not Engaged | 9% |

# Importance of First-Line Supervisors

**Our scale relies heavily on first-line supervisors**

- **Opportunity to perform well**
- **Satisfaction with recognition**
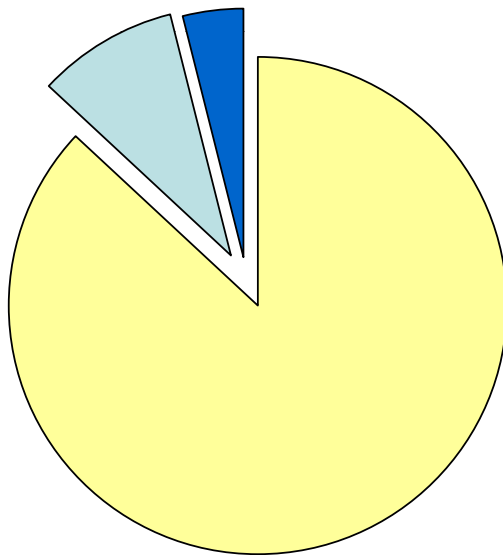- **Personal growth**
- **Positive work environment**

**Employees who believe their supervisors possess good management skills are more engaged than those who do not**

## My supervisor has good management skills:

**Engaged employees**

**Employees not engaged**
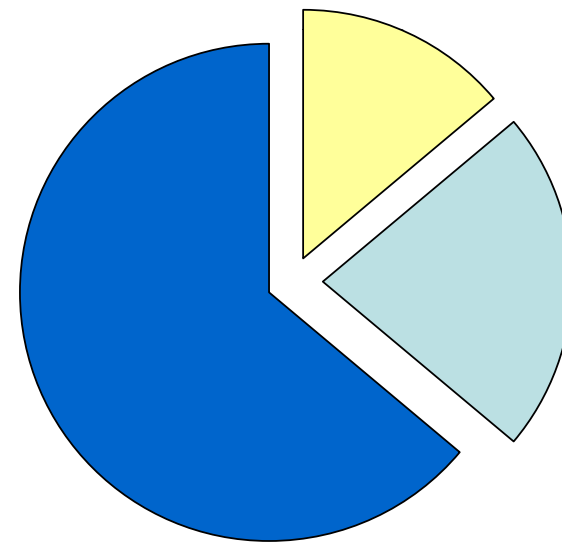
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 87% | Agree | 14% |
| 9% | Neither | 22% |
| 4% | Disagree | 64% |

# Importance of First-Line Supervisors

## My supervisor has good technical skills:

**Engaged employees**

**Employees not engaged**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 90% | Agree | 33% |
| 8% | Neither | 26% |
| 2% | Disagree | 41% |
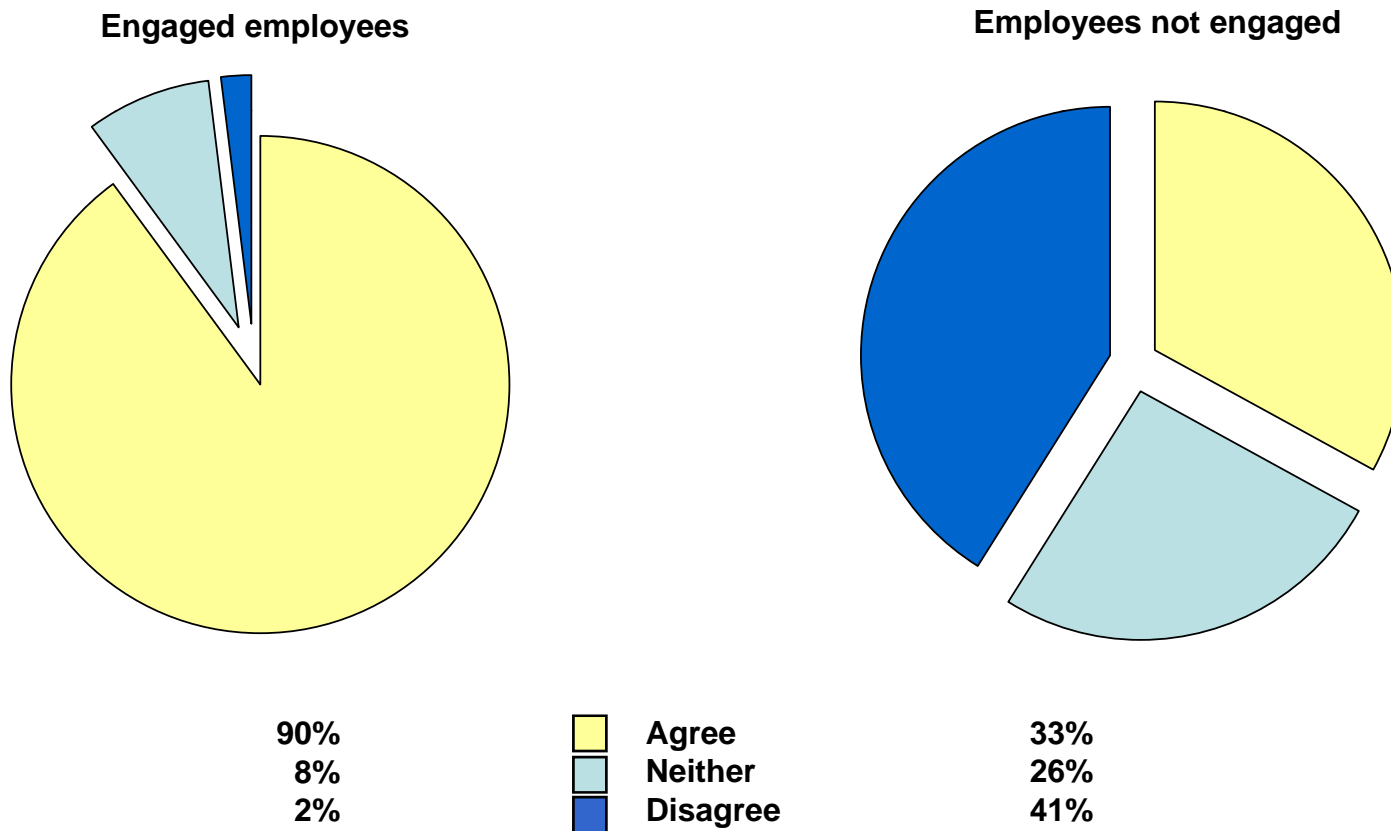
## Are you engaged?

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My agency is successful in accomplishing its mission | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| My work unit produces high quality products and services | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| The work I do is meaningful to me | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| I would recommend my agency as a place to work | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| Overall, I am satisfied with my supervisor | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| Overall, I am satisfied with managers above my immediate supervisor | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| I know what is expected of me on the job | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| My job makes good use of my skills and abilities | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have the resources to do my job well | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| Recognition and rewards are based on performance in my work unit | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| I am treated with respect at work | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| I have sufficient opportunities (such as challenging assignments or projects) to earn a high performance rating | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| I am satisfied with the recognition and awards I receive for my work | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work unit | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| My opinions count at work | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

**Are you engaged?**

Engaged:                 16 - 32

Somewhat Engaged:        33 - 48

Not Engaged:             49 - 80

# Federal Employee Perceptions

## 1. Pride in one's work or workplace

| | **% agree** |
|---|---|
| • My agency is successful in accomplishing its mission. | **76%** |
| • I would recommend my agency as a place to work. | **65%** |
| • The work I do is meaningful to me. | **86%** |
| • My work unit produces high quality products and services. | **80%** |

## 2. Satisfaction with leadership

**% agree**

- Overall, I am satisfied with my supervisor.     **65%**

- Overall, I am satisfied with managers above
  my immediate supervisor.     **47%**

## 3. Opportunity to perform well at work

|  | **% agree** |
|---|---|
| • I know what is expected of me on the job. | **85%** |
| • My job makes good use of my skills and abilities. | **68%** |
| • I have the resources to do my job well. | **64%** |
| • I have sufficient opportunities (such as challenging assignments or projects) to earn a high performance rating. | **60%** |

## 4. Satisfaction with recognition received

**% agree**

- Recognition and rewards are based on
performance in my work unit. **45%**

- I am satisfied with the recognition and awards
I receive for my work. **39%**

## 5. Prospect for future personal growth

**% agree**

- I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.                    **61%**

## 6. Positive work environment / teamwork

|  | **% agree** |
|---|---|
| • I am treated with respect at work. | **76%** |
| • My opinions count at work. | **54%** |
| • A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work unit. | **65%** |

## Recruit for a good person-job fit

- Develop new, or leverage existing, relationships

- Job announcements should entice candidates to apply

- Give an accurate preview of the job during the recruiting process

## Manage performance

- Show employees they are valued from their first day on the job

- Use effective performance management techniques

- Mentor employees

**Use a competency-based approach**

- **Provides for employee growth and opportunity for career advancement**

- **Analyzing employee competencies can assist with finding the right job fit**

- **Challenges employees**
    - **Rotational assignments**
    - **Special projects**
    - **Team leaders**

## Supervisory issues

- Recruit and select supervisors to supervise

- Train supervisors in effective performance management techniques

- Stimulate employee commitment:
    - Continually highlight the importance of their work
    - Facilitate the accomplishment of their work
    - Empower employees

**Measure employee engagement**

- Effective addition to program measures

- Importance of human resources staff

## Engagement scale included in MPS 2010

- Distinguish between constructs of employee engagement and job satisfaction

- Additional items based on further literature review

- Additional items based on text mining of MPS 2005 open-ended questions

**MPS 2005 open-ended question:**

"Please describe one improvement or change to your work situation your agency or supervisor could make that would improve your personal job performance."

- Compare words and phrases used by employees who are "engaged" and those who are "not engaged"

- Examine responses for suggestive patterns

## Pattern #1: Perception of Barriers

- • Engaged employees don't have enough resources.
- • "Not engaged" employees have poor work settings.

*New Agree/Disagree Questions:*
- • "Lack of resources, such as more staff, a larger budget, or more equipment and supplies, is a primary reason my performance is not at a higher level."

- • "Barriers to success, such as constraining rules or work processes, under-informed coworkers, or office politics, are the primary reasons my performance is not at a higher level."

44

## Pattern #2: Attribution of Blame

- Engaged employees blame other employees.
- "Not engaged" employees blame management.

_New Agree/Disagree Questions:_
- "The performance and/or conduct of other employees are the primary reasons my job performance is not higher."

- "The performance and/or conduct of my supervisors and managers are primary reasons my job performance is not higher."

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