Measuring Merit:
Using Survey Items to Gauge Adherence to Core Values

International Personnel Assessment Council

2011 Annual Conference

July 19, 2010

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

MSPB Mission

Serve as the guardian of Federal merit systems

Adjudication

Merit System Studies

Review of Significant Actions of OPM

Overview

- What we did
- Issues and lessons learned
  - Survey design
  - Interpretation and insight

Merit System Principles
The Foundation of Federal Employment

- Employment determined solely on qualifications

- Fair and equitable treatment without discrimination

- Equal pay for equal work

- High standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest

- Effective and efficient management of employees

- Retention/separation based on performance

- Providing employees with effective training and education

- Protection from partisan politics

- Protection from reprisal against whistleblowing

Ambitions

- Bring merit principles to life
  - Reach wide audience
  - Educate
  - Strengthen leadership and HR practice
  - Encourage long-term perspective
- Establish enduring measures
  - Continuing yet contemporary
  - Contemporary yet credible

Background

- Merit Principles Survey
  - 24 Federal departments and agencies
  - Over 42,000 responses
- 26 items keyed to 9 merit principles
  - Mix of explicit and implicit requirements
 - Mix of actions and outcomes
- Analysis: tabulations and FA/SEM

MPS 2010 – Items and Factors

| Factor	#	Item	Elements
Fairness	**1**	Recruit broadly, assess fairly, and select based on ability	Recruits a diverse pool of applicants
			Holds fair and open competition
			Selects the best-qualified candidates
	2	Treat employees fairly and equitably	Treats employees fairly
			Prevents prohibited discrimination
			Rectifies prohibited discrimination
Stewardship	**3**	Provide fair pay and incentives for excellence	Pays employees fairly
			Recognizes excellence
			Rewards excellence
	4	Demonstrate integrity and concern for the public interest	Holds employees to high standards of conduct
			Puts the public interest first
	5	Use the workforce efficiently and effectively	Uses the workforce efficiently and effectively
			Eliminates unnecessary functions and positions
			Makes good use of employees' skills and talents
			Focuses on what is most important
			Provides employees with necessary resources
	6	Base retention on performance	Addresses poor performers effectively
			Retains its best employees
	7	Educate to improve performance	Provides employees with necessary training
			Provides employees with opportunities for growth
Protection	**8**	Protect employees against arbitrary action, favoritism, political coercion, and reprisal	Protects employees against reprisal for exercising a right
			Protects employees against arbitrary action
			Does not engage in favoritism
			Protects employees from political coercion
			Prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation
	9	Protect employees against reprisal for speaking out in the public interest	Protects employees against reprisal for whistleblowing

Merit System Items by Level of Agreement
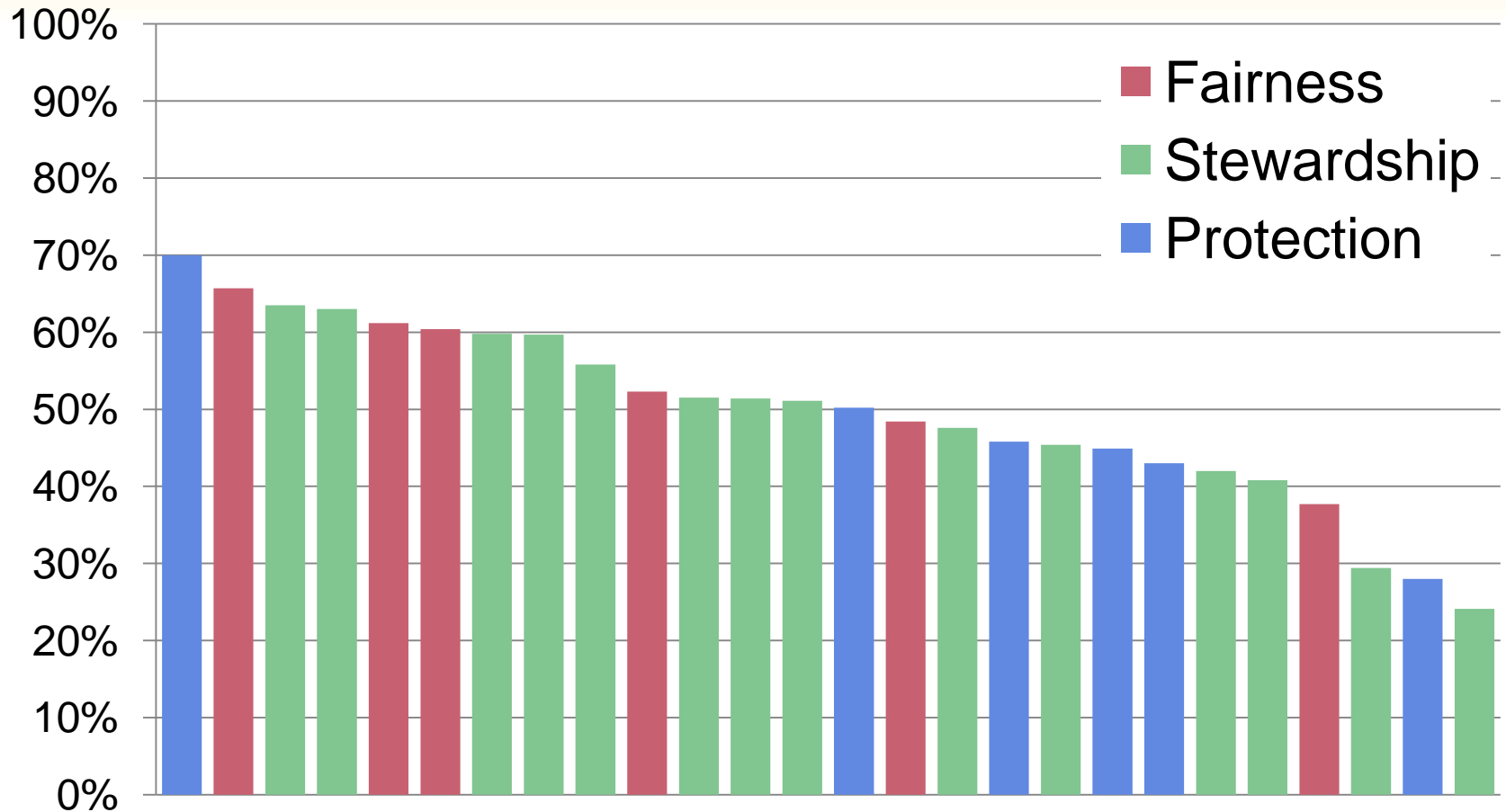
Highlights

- More agreement on intention (fairness) than execution (protection and stewardship)

- Supervisor-employee differences greatest on fairness and protection

- Agency differences greatest on stewardship

- Only moderate agreement on stewardship
  - Support (requirements for performance)
 - Leadership (vision, direction, utilization)

Structural Model: Hiring

	Recruitment		Competition		Selection	
Action	**Identify** job requirements and candidate sources	**Advertise** position	**Screen** applicants (minimum requirements)	**Assess** applicants (relative qualifications)	**Consider** • Qualifications • Needs • Public policy • Risks	**Select**
Result	Potential applicants	Actual applicants	Eligible applicants	Referred applicants	• Selections (new employees) • Nonselections (rejected applicants)	
Item	"My organization…Recruits a diverse pool of applicants for job vacancies."		"My organization…Holds fair and open competition for job vacancies."		"My organization…Selects the best-qualified applicants when filling jobs."	
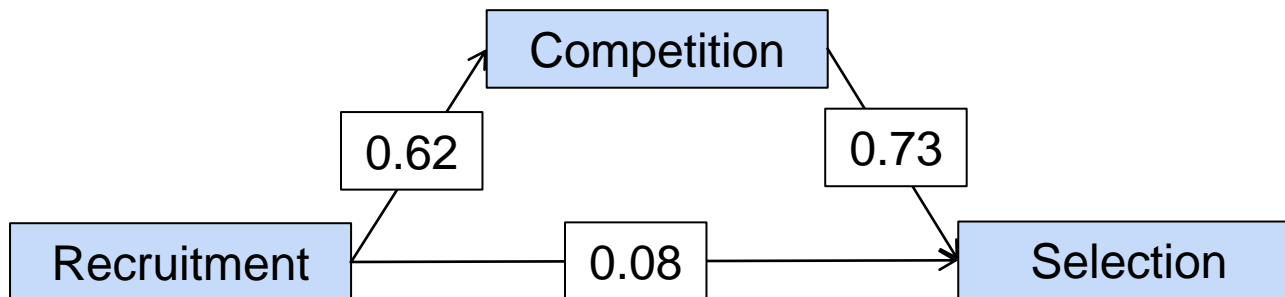
Structural Model: Leadership and Accountability

Item	Leadership
A	Provides necessary training
B	Provides resources necessary to get the job done
C	Uses the workforce efficiently and effectively
D	Eliminates unnecessary functions and positions

Item	Accountability
E	Holds employees to high standards of conduct
F	Addresses poor performers effectively
G	Makes good use of employees' skills and talents
H	Retains its best employees
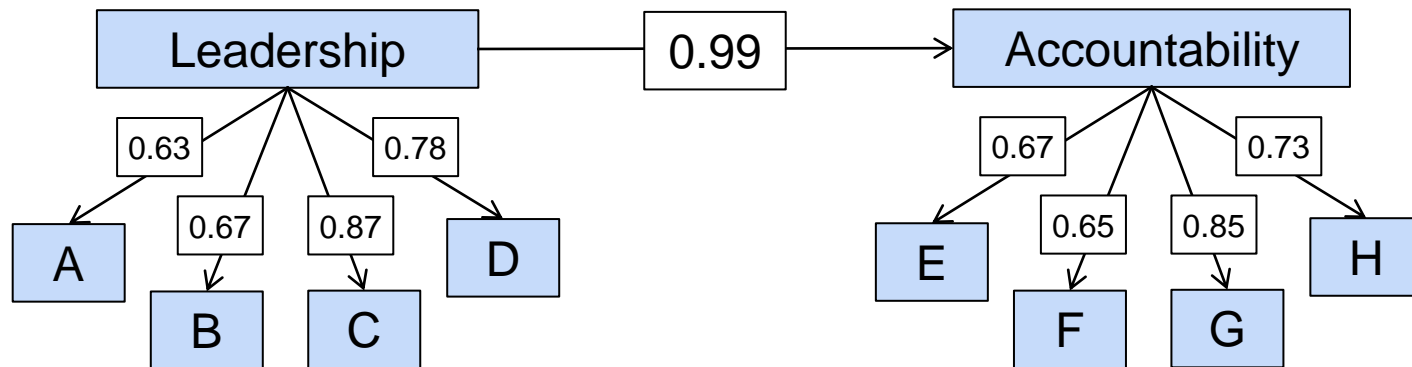
Protection: Employee Confidence is Key

Merit Principle			Survey Item
Protection	**8**	Protect employees against arbitrary action, favoritism, political coercion, and reprisal	Protects employees against reprisal for exercising a right
			Protects employees against arbitrary action
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Issues - Design

- Issue: point of reference – "organization"
- Issue: extent of knowledge/experience
- Issue: statutory basis
  - Fidelity to text
  - Elaboration of concepts

Issues – Interpretation and Action

- Issue: interpreting agreement
  - What levels are good? Attainable?
- Issue: making results actionable
  - Abstract ideals
  - Varying causes and conditions
  - Environment

Lessons Learned

- A value-based instrument can work
- Make analysis reader-centered
  - FA can simplify
  - Multiple perspectives can reinforce
- Draw on other sources of information
  - Workforce data
  - Literature (professional and informed)
  - Illustrations and good practices