



## TRAINING SUPERVISORS TO BE LEADERS

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A MISSING ELEMENT IN EFFORTS TO IMPROVE FEDERAL PERFORMANCE

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PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonprofit organization that works to revitalize federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works.

## FOREWORD

In 2003, the Partnership for Public Service launched an unprecedented effort to measure employee satisfaction at federal agencies. The resulting product was our *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings, the most comprehensive analysis to date on federal worker engagement. *Best Places* revealed not only which agencies are doing the best job of engaging their workers, but also how they are doing it. And when it comes to engaging workers and maximizing their talents, one factor consistently rises above all others — leadership.

Effective leadership emerged as the key driver of employee satisfaction in the inaugural *Best Places* rankings, and again in 2005 and 2007. Unfortunately, in addition to being vitally important, *Best Places* also reveals that leadership is an area of concern in the federal government. Among a series of 10 workplace environment categories that are measured in the rankings, the score for “effective leadership” consistently ranks near the bottom and represents the area where the government most lags behind the private sector. The federal government conducts an annual survey of its employees, and comparable private sector benchmarks are available for 14 questions in this human capital survey. The two questions where the percentage of positive responses from government workers lags the private sector most dramatically are both leadership-related matters, including the question of how good a job is being done by one’s immediate supervisor.

With the support of the Walter and Leonore Annenberg Foundation, the Partnership for Public Service has launched a new effort to close the leadership gap in our federal government. The central component of this project will be the *Annenberg Leadership Institute*, which will help to develop the leadership skills of a select cadre of talented federal workers through a combination of hands-on learning experiences and coursework. Before embarking on a new effort to improve federal leadership, the Partnership felt it was important to get a better understanding of the federal government’s current efforts to train and develop leaders. To that end, the Partnership asked Dr. James Thompson of the University of Illinois at Chicago to assess leadership training and development programs in the federal government.

Based on a comprehensive literature review and an extensive series of interviews, Dr. Thompson’s report provides an excellent overview of the federal government’s strengths and weaknesses when it comes to leadership development. While the report and its recommendations reflect the views of Dr. Thompson and not the Partnership for Public Service, we believe this is an important report that will enhance the ongoing debate about how to improve the way we train and develop federal leaders.



Max Stier

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TRAINING SUPERVISORS TO BE LEADERS</b>	<b>2</b>
INTRODUCTION	2
THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS TO AGENCY PERFORMANCE	3
IS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROVIDING ITS EMPLOYEES WITH GOOD LEADERS?	4
THE NEGLECT OF FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS	5
LEVERAGING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TO BUILD MANAGEMENT CAPACITY	6
THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT “TEMPLATE”	6
CLASSROOM EDUCATION AND TRAINING	6
FEEDBACK-INTENSIVE PROGRAMS	7
DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS	7
JOB ASSIGNMENTS	8
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS FACTORS	9
CREATE A CONTINUOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	9
ENGAGE MID-LEVEL MANAGERS IN SUPERVISORY TRAINING	9
ENSURE TOP LEADER COMMITMENT	10
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR FEDERAL SUPERVISORS	11
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS	11
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AGENCY HEADS	17
CONCLUSION	19
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>22</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When it comes to the performance of our federal workforce, the stakes are high. Emerging challenges ranging from the spread of avian flu to the threat of terrorism demand that the 1.9 million public servants in our federal government achieve high levels of performance and be fully engaged in their work.

There is widespread agreement that to elicit a high level of effort, employees must be provided with effective leadership. For the bulk of the workforce, the most relevant leadership comes from first-line supervisors. Supervisors have direct contact with workers and impact day-to-day performance more than managers at other levels.

Previous research reveals that, within the federal sector, individuals are selected as supervisors largely on the basis of their technical qualifications. Unfortunately, those with the best “hard,” technical skills do not always make the best leaders. Of equal, if not greater importance, are “soft” skills such as communication, team-building and conflict resolution.

Soft skills are generally taught under the rubric of “leadership development,” a topic that has received substantial attention within the federal government in recent years. The focus, however, has generally been at the executive level. To the extent that such training has been provided at subsidiary levels, it has been largely in the context of succession planning systems in which resources are concentrated on a “select few” targeted for promotion. Relatively few agencies have adopted a “capacity building” approach in which leadership training resources are distributed more evenly.

This report focuses on a relatively small number of agencies that have adopted a capacity-building approach to leadership training for first-line supervisors. Those agencies could potentially serve as exemplars for the rest of the government. Extensive interviews were conducted with experts within and outside of government to identify best practices and which agencies employ them. An initial list of nearly 30 agencies reputed to do a good job of cultivating leadership talent was ultimately winnowed down to six whose programs are particularly robust. The six are the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA).

One finding is that while each agency needs to develop a plan that meets its particular needs, there is a high degree of consensus on the core elements of a strong leadership

development program. Those components are classroom education and training; performance feedback from a manager’s supervisors and subordinates; developmental relationships such as mentoring; and challenging job assignments. Although they are among the least commonly used elements, some experts believe that developmental job assignments are the most valuable leadership development technique.

Another finding is that, as parts of the government move toward pay-for-performance compensation systems and other human resource management innovations, the absence of adequate soft skills on the part of some supervisors is likely to become more and more apparent. In a pay-for-performance environment, supervisors must be prepared to deal with the human dynamics that will ensue. For example, some individuals would be told that they are contributing less than others and that they will receive smaller pay increases as a result. If poorly handled, such situations can result in withdrawal, higher levels of employee grievances and a diminution of performance.

At the macro level, the three common characteristics of successful leadership development efforts are the creation of a continuous learning environment, the involvement of mid-level managers in the training of their subordinate supervisors, and commitment from top leadership.

Based on these findings, the report includes a series of recommendations for both policy-makers and agency heads. These recommendations include:

- Create a government-wide supervisory corps that would require federal managers to demonstrate certain leadership competencies
- Mandate leadership training for ALL supervisors, not just the best and brightest
- Require the use of metrics to assess program impact
- Hold executives accountable for developing their subordinates

It is encouraging to note that some positive momentum is building to address existing deficiencies. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has issued new guidelines regarding leadership development, many agencies have begun to increase their investment in leadership training for supervisors, and the Chairman of the Senate subcommittee that oversees the federal civil service has introduced legislation to expand leadership training. These are all critical early steps to improving federal leadership. The sooner we take these steps, the sooner we will see the improved performance from our federal workforce that the times demand.

# TRAINING SUPERVISORS TO BE LEADERS

## INTRODUCTION

The consensus among a number of key observers is that a successful supervisor requires “soft” interpersonal as well as “hard” technical and administrative skills. At issue are the non-technical skills in communication, motivation, conflict resolution and team building that are often generically labeled as “leadership” skills. That such a need exists is not surprising. There is research in support of, and an intuitive appeal to the idea, that organizations led by individuals who are adept at managing human dynamics will perform better than those headed by individuals who are not. Yet, it is surprising how little attention most agencies give to developing these soft skills among their first-line supervisors.

A number of dynamics appear to be at work. One has to do with the ambiguous position that first-line supervisors hold at the bottom of the management chain, trusted fully by neither management nor employees. A second has to do with the traditional emphasis on selecting supervisors who are technical experts. Finally, it is a simple fact that because of the large numbers involved, training supervisors can be costly.

There is some evidence that the tide has begun to shift. A number of agencies are investing significant, additional resources in leadership training for supervisors. In 2007, Senator Daniel Akaka (D-HI), who chairs the subcommittee that oversees the federal workforce, introduced the Federal Supervisor Training Act which would mandate expanded leadership training for federal supervisors. In 2006, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued “Guidelines for Managerial Development” aimed at leadership development needs.

One factor behind this change in attitude is the spread of a “results-orientation” within the federal government associated with the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act and with President Bush’s President’s Management Agenda. More than in the past, managers at all levels are being held accountable for achieving measurable organizational results. Motivating employees to commit their discretionary energies to the job is essential to improving results, and federal supervisors will have to drive this process.

A second factor is the increasing number of federal employees whose annual pay increase is linked to performance considerations. Particularly notable in this regard are new payband/pay-for-performance systems either

planned or in place at the departments of Defense (DoD) and Homeland Security (DHS). A report by the Merit Systems Protection Board states that:

As a linchpin between management and front-line employees, supervisors play a pivotal role in pay-for-performance settings. Not only do they translate organizational goals into concrete objectives for individual employees, but they also control employees’ access to the resources they need to accomplish these goals. Although supervisors typically perform critical functions within any organization, pay-for-performance demands a higher level of supervisory skill than traditional tenure-based pay systems.<sup>1</sup>

In a pay-for-performance environment, the supervisor’s assessment of employee performance is a key factor in the pay-setting process. Supervisors must be prepared to deal with the human dynamics that will ensue. For example, some individuals would be told that they are contributing less than others and that they will receive smaller pay increases as a result. The skills to effectively convey expectations, support employees as they strive to meet those expectations and assist those not meeting expectations will be at a premium. Supervisors will need to be able to effectively resolve the inevitable differences that will arise over performance and pay determinations while creating a trustful work environment that keeps those differences to a minimum. Other challenges that will require enhanced capabilities on the part of supervisors are an increasingly diverse and multi-generational workforce, the use of new technologies, which may reduce personal contact, and a multi-sector workforce in which some of the organization’s work is carried out by contract employees, grantees or third-party organizations.

This report identifies a small number of agencies that do a good job providing leadership/soft skills training to first-line supervisors. A total of 28 agencies reputed to do well in this regard were contacted. Although the programs at any of these agencies could be considered models, those at six of the agencies were found to be particularly robust. The agencies are the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Federal

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Designing an Effective Pay for Performance Compensation System*, 6.

Aviation Administration (FAA), the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA).

The report identifies commonalities as well as differences among the programs. It examines what has and what has not worked from the perspective of agency officials. This analysis should enable other federal agencies to learn from the experiences of the six.

It is important to note that although leadership training for supervisors is particularly important in a pay-for-performance environment, only two of the six featured agencies, the FAA and the GAO, currently utilize such compensation systems for a majority of their employees. Officials at the other four agencies have made supervisory training a priority based less on pay-for-performance considerations than on a general interest in enhancing organizational performance. These agencies are convinced that continuing pressures to do more with less, to meet and exceed performance objectives, and to induce higher levels of productivity among employees require that the skill levels of managers at all levels be enhanced.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS TO AGENCY PERFORMANCE

The contention that leadership training for first-line supervisors can contribute to higher levels of organizational performance relies in part on research showing a link between employee “engagement” and outcomes. In fact, a 2004 Corporate Leadership Council study of 50,000 employees worldwide reveals that 22 of the top 25 drivers of employee intent-to-stay are manager-led. Overall, manager-led drivers have the potential to impact employee discretionary effort by 20 percent or more. In particular, there is a high correlation between employee engagement and the extent to which the employee’s immediate supervisor:

- Clearly articulates organizational goals
- Sets realistic performance expectations
- Adapts to changing circumstances<sup>2</sup>

The CLC defines engagement as, “the extent to which employees commit — both rationally and emotionally — to something or someone in their organization, how hard they work, and how long they stay as a result of

that commitment.”<sup>3</sup> The leadership skills of the supervisor are particularly critical to gaining emotional commitment such that the employee “values, enjoys and believes in his/her job, manager, team or organization.”<sup>4</sup> CLC’s research suggests emotional commitment has the largest impact on discretionary effort as opposed to rational commitment which refers to whether the employee’s financial, development or professional needs are being met.<sup>5</sup>

A 2005 report by the Partnership for Public Service confirms a strong relationship between quality of supervision and work group performance.<sup>6</sup> Based on results from four federal agencies, the Partnership concludes that, “Good supervision matters to team performance. Supervisors affect organizational performance. Better supervised workgroups are better performing workgroups.”<sup>7</sup> Many of the tasks identified by the Partnership as most closely linked to supervisory performance fall in the “leadership” category. They include the ability to:

- Listen and show understanding
- Identify developmental needs
- Promote teamwork
- Address work-related conflict in a work group
- Respect supervisees

These findings are consistent with research by the Gallup organization that shows that the single greatest influence on an employee’s engagement is the employee’s immediate supervisor.<sup>8</sup> According to Gallup, supervisory practices that foster engagement include conveying clear work expectations, providing recognition and praise, listening to employee opinions, encouraging employee development, and creating a sense of caring for employees as individuals.

Research by Professor Gene Brewer of the University of Georgia provides additional evidence in support of a link between supervisory abilities and organizational performance. In an analysis of data from the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board’s (MSPB’s) Merit Principles

2 Corporate Leadership Council, *Driving Employee Retention Through Engagement: A Quantitative Analysis of the Effectiveness of Employee Engagement Strategies* (2004).

3 Corporate Leadership Council, xii.

4 Corporate Leadership Council, xii.

5 Corporate Leadership Council, 6.

6 Partnership for Public Service, *Can We Really Manage? Understanding Supervision and Its Importance in Government*.

7 Partnership for Public Service, 3.

8 “Engagement,” according to Gallup is a “condition that engenders satisfaction and other emotional outcomes like loyalty and pride.” See James K. Harter, Taking Feedback to the Bottom Line. *Gallup Management Journal* (March 15, 2001), available online at: (<http://gmj.gallup.com>).

Survey, Brewer found “supervisory proficiency” to be among the most important predictors of an agency’s performance.<sup>9</sup> Brewer comments that supervisors, “mediate between higher-level managers and street-level bureaucrats ... are important conduits in the organizational hierarchy; they exercise considerable discretion; and ... are important policy makers at the operational level.”<sup>10</sup>

Interviews conducted for purposes of this report largely substantiate Brewer’s findings. For example, Lee Salmon, a former federal supervisor now with the Federal Consulting Group observes that, “[First line management] is the most difficult level at which to manage. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is where priorities are set and where people are delegated to do the work.” Jeff Neal, Director of Human Resources for the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) comments that, “The first-line supervisors are the bridge between the senior leadership of the agency and the people who do the work in the agency.”

Neal argues that supervisors are particularly critical to organizations like DLA, which are attempting fundamental change in how they do business. Neal adds:

When you want to transform an organization and you’ve got somebody at the senior level saying to the entire workforce, “here’s what we’re going to do, we’re going to make these changes and things are going to be different,” and then you’ve got somebody at the supervisory level saying, “Never mind him, he’ll be gone in two years. You can’t change it.” You can’t transform an organization from the highest levels. You have to do it with people who are on the ground with the employees and who the employees talk to every day.

In a similar vein, T.J. Larkin and Sandar Larkin write in the *Harvard Business Review* that, “front-line supervisors — not senior managers — are the opinion leaders in your organization,” and that supervisors are therefore, “critical to the success of any change effort.”<sup>11</sup>

The importance of good supervisory practices is most apparent in their absence. In a 2003 report, the National Academy for Public Administration (NAPA) notes that, “many studies have found that the most common reason employees leave an organization is because of

poor supervisors or managers.”<sup>12</sup> DLA exit survey results routinely show “immediate supervisor’s style/competence” as among the top five reasons that employees leave that agency.

#### IS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROVIDING ITS EMPLOYEES WITH GOOD LEADERS?

Despite the apparent importance of a well-trained supervisory cadre to the organization, the records of most federal agencies in attending to this need are decidedly mixed. The Merit Systems Protection Board’s 2005 survey results find that while 68 percent of federal employees believe their supervisors are technically competent, only 56 percent of employees believe their supervisors have good management skills.<sup>13</sup> Particularly lacking are the leadership skills identified by Gallup as key to employee engagement. For example, only 47 percent of those surveyed by the MSPB agreed that “my immediate supervisor provides coaching, training opportunities, and other assistance to help me improve my skills and performance.” Similar patterns are seen in federal employee responses to questions in OPM’s 2002, 2004 and 2006 Federal Human Capital Surveys which are in turn correlated with the rankings of federal agencies as *Best Places to Work* (see [www.bestplacetowork.org](http://www.bestplacetowork.org)) developed by the Partnership for Public Service and American University. In 2006, employee satisfaction with leadership effectiveness government-wide was only 50.5.<sup>14</sup>

The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) summarized the comments by focus group participants on the “perceived environment and current skill base” of federal managers and supervisors. This research found that first-line supervisors too often:

- Lack communications skills, both written and oral
- Lack team building skills
- Have general technical knowledge
- Are not chosen for their ‘people skills’
- Are not well trained in supervision
- Do not know how to deal with people issues and lack sensitivity

9 Brewer, Gene, “In the eye of the storm: Frontline supervisors and federal agency performance,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 505-527.

10 Brewer, 507.

11 Larkin, T.J. and Sandar Larkin, “Reaching and Changing Frontline Employees,” *Harvard Business Review* (May/June 1996), 102.

12 National Academy of Public Administration, *First Line Supervisors In Federal Service: Selection, Development and Management*, 48.

13 U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Accomplishing Our Mission: Results of the Merit Principles Survey 2005*, available online at: ([http://www.mspb.gov/studies/rpt\\_03-23-07\\_merit\\_survey\\_final5/survey.pdf](http://www.mspb.gov/studies/rpt_03-23-07_merit_survey_final5/survey.pdf)).

14 Partnership for Public Service, *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government 2007*, available online at (<http://bestplacetowork.org>).



- Lack listening skills
- Receive minimal and dated supervisory training
- Lack the resources and time for development<sup>15</sup>

One reason for the apparent shortcomings of the federal supervisory corps is that, in most agencies, supervisors are chosen for their jobs on the basis of their technical expertise rather than their leadership skills. In 1998, the MSPB reported that “individuals often are chosen for federal supervisory jobs primarily on the basis of their technical expertise rather than on their supervisory or managerial potential.”<sup>16</sup> In a 2003 report, NAPA concluded that “most agencies select the most competent technician for supervisory openings without considering leadership capability,” and that “with some exceptions, federal agencies do a poor job of managing this corporate asset, beginning with the selection process.”<sup>17</sup> Only 29 percent of the supervisors surveyed by NAPA agreed with the statement that, “my agency does a good job of electing new supervisors and managers.” NAPA urged agencies to recognize that “a good supervisor possesses a dual competency base — both technical credibility and leadership capabilities or potential.”<sup>18</sup>

Interviewees provided confirmation for these findings. For example, Jeff Neal comments that at the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), supervisors “previously were selected for their technical qualifications, not for their leadership qualifications. We would put them into the position. We would let them fail for a while and then we would say, ‘what happened to them because they seemed so promising before?’” Michael Martin, Acting Director for Leadership and Employee Development at the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST), says that NIST started its leadership development efforts in 1995 after laboratory directors realized that great scientists do not equate to great leaders.

#### THE NEGLECT OF FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS

As a group, first-line supervisors tend to be a neglected resource within the federal government. Supervisory positions were a primary downsizing target during the Clinton administration.

New York University’s Paul Light estimates that the number of GS 11-15 managers and supervisors declined by approximately 35,000, or 22 percent, between 1992 and 1997.<sup>19</sup> They continue to be scrutinized under President Bush. The President’s Management Agenda directs agencies to “reduce the number of managers, reduce the number of organizational layers ... and change the span of control.”<sup>20</sup> While the number of first-level supervisors has leveled off over the past several years at just under 200,000, there continue to be high demands placed on this cohort.

Part of the problem is the ambiguous status that supervisors hold. In its 2001 report entitled, *Supervisors in the Federal Government: A Wake-Up Call*, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management comments, “During our interviews, many supervisors voiced frustration about being underpaid and unappreciated for doing a tough job. They feel like a forgotten group; they are no longer employees, but they are not viewed by executives as part of the management team.”<sup>21</sup> Former Vice Admiral and DLA head Keith Lippert describes the problem as follows:

We pick a person from the workforce. He or she automatically becomes part of the management team. The workforce doesn’t trust that person anymore because he or she is now management, and management doesn’t trust them because they just came from the workforce.

Lippert adds:

We put people in these situations with no help. What they do is they mimic people they have worked for in the past and our history says that’s not good enough and so you continue to foster mediocre management and leadership skills within the agency.

In recognition of the potentially critical role that the supervisory corps can play in promoting good performance, DLA has now dramatically upgraded the quantity and quality of leadership training provided supervisors. All DLA supervisors are now required to participate in a two-year training effort that includes a range of learning methods.

15 National Academy of Public Administration, 40.

16 U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board. *Federal Supervisors and Strategic Human Resources Management*, 8.

17 National Academy of Public Administration, 3.

18 National Academy of Public Administration, 21.

19 Light, Paul, *The True Size of Government*.

20 U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *The President’s Management Agenda*, 13, available online at (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2002/mgmt.pdf>).

21 U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Supervisors in the Federal Government: A Wake-Up Call*, 19.

## LEVERAGING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TO BUILD MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

A key to the approach at the DLA, CIA, NSA, IRS, FAA and GAO is the recognition of the importance of addressing the needs of the supervisory corps as a group rather than as “high-potential” individuals. The succession planning model that appears to guide much leadership training in the federal government involves identifying those best qualified to serve as future top executives and then providing this select group with extensive training and development opportunities. Only those selected for participation through an extensive application and review procedure are allowed to participate. The six identified agencies have instead determined that all supervisors should benefit from such training. The objective is less one of identifying and preparing individuals for leadership positions than to build management capacity.

The difference between the two approaches is effectively articulated in a recent report by CPS Human Resource Services.<sup>22</sup> CPS uses the term “just-in-time” to describe the succession planning approach to leadership development. In its report, CPS describes this just-in-time approach as “targeted toward a narrow segment of the workforce such as high-potential managers or new leaders,” and as “disconnected from other efforts such as recruitment . . . retention and performance management.”<sup>23</sup> In contrast, an alternative or “integrated” approach “doesn’t focus solely on organizational elites; it addresses the long-term developmental needs of workers at many levels and across the employee lifecycle.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, CIA, DLA, NSA, IRS, FAA and GAO have independently decided to implement versions of an “integrated” or capacity-building model.<sup>25</sup> DLA, NSA, IRS and GAO are among the agencies that now mandate leadership training for all supervisors.

22 CPS Human Resource Services, *Building the Leadership Pipeline in Local, State, and Federal Government*.

23 CPS Human Resource Services, 1.

24 CPS Human Resource Services, 2.

25 Some agencies such as the GAO and IRS administer both models in parallel.

## THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT “TEMPLATE”

Although there is no single, accepted leadership development “technology,” there is a fairly high degree of consensus on the elements of a strong leadership development program. Practice in this regard has been heavily influenced by the research of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). According to CCL, leadership training should include classroom education and training, feedback-intensive programs, developmental relationships and job assignments.<sup>26</sup> Traditionally, federal agencies have relied almost exclusively on classroom education and training. However, concurrent with developments in the private sector, there has been a recent trend toward supplementing classroom activities with alternative delivery methods.

### CLASSROOM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

All the agencies contacted in the course of this research include some classroom training as part of their leadership development curriculum. The amount of training provided varies considerably between agencies, from as little as three days to as much as three weeks of training. Eighty total hours of classroom training appears to be an informal standard.

In many instances, supervisory training tends to be heavily weighted toward technical subjects such as how to handle equal employment opportunity claims or grievances, how to track time and attendance, and how to administer the mechanics of the performance appraisal system. While some “soft skills” training is provided (e.g., how to motivate employees, manage conflict, communicate effectively create teams), the emphasis is on providing the supervisor with basic knowledge of the responsibilities of his/her position so that, in the words of one official, they don’t “fall down a manhole” in the first six months. Individuals who wish to gain leadership skills beyond what is provided as part of the formal training are generally on their own.

Leading agencies have found ways to accommodate supervisors’ need for developing their hard and soft skills. The IRS delivers most of the technical training for new supervisors online, reserving its classroom resources for soft-skills training such as “Leading Teams” and “Leadership is a Choice.” Leadership is a Choice is a two-week class for new first-line supervisors, which covers topics such as “Stepping Into Leadership,” “Coaching

26 McCauley, C. and E. Van Velsor, “Our View of Leadership Development,” in C. McCauley and E. Van Velsor, *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*.

for Success,” and “Making the Most of Meetings.” CIA has developed a three-week course entitled, “Leadership on the Line” in which supervisors are taught to “lead people,” “drive for results,” “build relationships” and “lead change.” Many agencies rely on outside vendors such as the Office of Personnel Management’s Management Development Centers to train their supervisors.

For classroom training to have its intended effect, the skills and knowledge gained need to be applied on the job. Ellen Van Velsor and Cynthia McCauley of the Center for Creative Leadership endorse an approach in which classroom work is split into segments so that participants can apply what they have learned in the workplace between sessions.<sup>27</sup> GAO has a six-day program for team leaders divided into three, two-day blocks spread over three months. Carol Willett, Chief Learning Officer for GAO, notes that developmental activities continue between the blocks, including the application of leadership principles and the analysis of leadership tasks as a “huge piece” of the training.

Supervisors in CIA’s “Leadership on the Line” program attend two weeks of classroom training, return to their unit for three weeks and then come back for five more days of training. According to the director of CIA’s Leadership Academy, Barry Miller, participants are tasked with getting “quick wins” in the workplace between sessions based on what they learned in the first session. Miller defines a “quick win” as “something in the workplace that can be enhanced.” Miller says that the purpose is to emphasize that “learning is not, ‘here’s the starting point and you are done.’ It is, ‘what are you taking back? How do you maximize practice and application?’ It is the beginning of learning, not the end.”

#### FEEDBACK-INTENSIVE PROGRAMS

Leadership development programs often include a diagnostic element whereby each individual’s strengths and weaknesses as a leader are identified. Some programs use personality tests such as Myers-Briggs while others use “multi-source feedback” (MSF) tools. With multi-source feedback, the supervisor receives an appraisal of his/her performance not only from her own supervisor but also from her subordinates, peers and perhaps even customers. The premise is that each group has a different perspective on the supervisor’s performance and hence can lend insight into how that performance can

be improved. For example, in a 1992 study, the Merit Systems Protection Board found that:

The nonsupervisory employees did not always agree with the first-line supervisors or second-level supervisors concerning supervisors’ level of performance on the 14 most important tasks, relative to one another. For example, the first-line supervisors and second-level supervisors saw being fair and consistent in dealing with employees as one of the tasks that first-line supervisors performed the best, whereas nonsupervisory employees saw it as one of the worst.<sup>28</sup>

Glenn Leuschner, Dean of the Center for Leadership and Professional Development at the NSA describes multi-source feedback as “a compelling tool” and adds, “It helps identify gaps and strengths, these then become the focus of the training: how to develop your strengths and mitigate the gaps.” At the DLA, all managers are required to undergo a multi-source feedback assessment every two years. Each supervisor is required to develop an action plan on how she will address any deficiencies.

#### DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

Examples of developmental relationships include mentoring, coaching and action learning teams. According to CCL, “a mentoring relationship is typically defined as a committed, long-term relationship in which a senior person (mentor) supports the personal and professional development of a junior person (protégé).”<sup>29</sup>

Mentoring is given less emphasis than are other means of leadership development among the six highlighted agencies. One agency that has put resources into mentoring is the Air Force Materiel Command (AMC) headquartered at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. AMC acquired a Web-based system which provides online training in mentoring and which matches prospective mentees with mentors. With this system, communication occurs primarily by email and by phone so that mentors and mentees need not be in geographic proximity. According to Leif Peterson, Director of Human Resources at Wright Patterson, 3,000 employees, both mentees and mentors are using the system.

Coaching generally refers to a formal relationship between an external coach, often someone from a firm

27 Guthrie, V. and S. King, “Feedback Intensive Programs,” in C. McCauley and E. Van Velsor, *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*, 32.

28 U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Federal First-Line Supervisors: How Good Are They?*, 23.

29 McCauley, C. and C. Douglas, “Developmental Relationships,” in C. McCauley and E. Van Velsor, *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*, 92.

specializing in this area, and an agency executive. The purpose is to assist the person being coached in addressing a particular developmental challenge. Glenn Leuschner says that of all NSA's leadership development activities, executive coaching has provided the greatest return on investment (ROI). An evaluation done by NSA's Organization Development Services unit showed an ROI of 131 percent based on participants' perceptions of increased productivity, cost reduction and improved teamwork.<sup>30</sup> Ninety-four percent of participants reported that they were able to successfully apply what they gained from coaching in the workplace. Forty-eight percent reported improved teamwork, and 42 percent reported improved quality of work. Despite these outcomes, the program is expensive and, hence, has not yet been extended to the supervisory level. DLA does, however, provide coaching services to first-line supervisors. DLA has been able to manage the cost by providing those services by telephone and the Internet rather than in person.

With action learning, teams of managers/supervisors work under the direction of a senior manager on what Cynthia D. McCauley and Christina A. Douglas of the Center for Creative Leadership call a "strategic organizational issue."<sup>31</sup> McCauley and Douglas state that, "Learning is an explicit goal of the project, so time is devoted to meet as a team ... to discuss the dilemmas the team is encountering, to examine the theories and concepts team members are applying to the project, and to discover new ways of thinking or creative alternatives to accomplish their objectives."<sup>32</sup> McCauley and Douglas say that the project should "not be made up," and that the teams should be guided by "skilled facilitators."<sup>33</sup>

## JOB ASSIGNMENTS

"Challenging job assignments are perhaps the most important form of leader development that exists," according to Patricia Ohlott of the Center for Creative Leadership. Ohlott describes developmental job assignments as:

Something that stretches people, pushes them out of their comfort zone, and requires them to think and act differently ... These assignments place people in a challenging situation full of problems to solve, dilemmas to resolve, obstacles to overcome, and choices to make under conditions of risk and uncertainty.<sup>34</sup>

The rotation of trainees through a series of challenging job assignments is a common feature of succession planning efforts. For example, Paul Harrison, Director of Training at the Social Security Administration (SSA) says that aspiring supervisors selected for SSA's Leadership Development program are given a series of developmental assignments in units other than their home unit. These are "stretch" assignments in the sense that trainees are exposed to a different environment and are expected to learn and apply new skills.

Rotational assignments become more problematic in a capacity-building approach targeted at all supervisory employees. Such programs involve larger numbers of trainees, each of whom has to be placed and supervised. Further, a stretch assignment generally requires that the trainee is taken off-line for an extended period. At SSA, trainees are gone from their regular positions for 1.5 years. Such a practice could have an adverse operational impact when a large number of supervisors are involved.

Many agencies encourage the creation of "individual development plans" or IDPs to identify specific needs and means for addressing those needs. A common approach is to center the IDP on areas of weakness as identified through a multi-source feedback instrument. Glenn Leuschner of the NSA says IDPs are, "crucial to charting a career path for managers." The IDP identifies, for example, "What are my strengths? Where is there room for improvement? How will improvement occur?" But according to Leuschner, less than half of the managers at NSA actually use IDPs.

30 NSA Center for Leadership and Professional Development, *NSA Executive Coaching Pilot Study*.

31 NSA, 109.

32 NSA, 109.

33 NSA, 109.

34 Ohlott, P., "Job Assignments," in C. McCauley and E. Van Velsor, *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*, 154.

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS FACTORS

The leadership development programs for first-line supervisors surveyed here include many common elements. However, these elements are combined in different ways such that there exists substantial variation in approaches. No single “best approach” has been identified. In fact, many experts argue that a program should be tailored to the needs of the organization or agency. There is nevertheless widespread agreement on three factors that are critical to the success of leadership development programs: the creation of a continuous learning environment, the involvement of mid-level managers in the training of their subordinates and top-leader commitment.

### CREATE A CONTINUOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Ellen Van Velsor and Cynthia McCauley of the Center for Creative Leadership write, “One major criticism of the approach of many organizations to leader development is that it is not systemic but rather events-based ... there is no question of determining readiness, no feedback prior to training, no planned support of reinforcement upon return ...”<sup>35</sup> They add, “Leadership development is an ongoing process.”<sup>36</sup> Asked what advice he would give agencies interested in expanding their leadership development programs, Jim Trinka, Director of Technical Training and Development at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), says to “move away from an event-based leadership development program to a systematic, deliberate, career-long program.” Some organizations have leadership development events, but Trinka says, “They are random. People are happy to get something and there may be some on-the-job learning, but what is needed is a framework with customized competencies for the organization with programs at each level. Leadership means learning,” says Trinka. “Once you become a leader, you are not done.”

Several agencies have created mechanisms to continue the learning experience after the classroom training is finished. For example, GAO organizes each supervisory cohort into a “Leadership Community of Practice.” The intent is that after the coursework is complete, participants will continue to meet as a group. The Community of Practice serves as a forum in which issues that arise in the workplace can be discussed. CIA’s Leadership Academy sponsors periodic workshops on leadership issues for those who have taken the “Leadership on the

Line” course, as well as an annual “Leadership Day” for its alumni. The IRS sends monthly “e-lessons” to graduates of its “Leading Teams” course. According to Matt Ferrero of the IRS, the e-lessons include, “tips and hints on how to apply tools and techniques from the course to yourself and your teams. It keeps the course fresh.”

### ENGAGE MID-LEVEL MANAGERS IN SUPERVISORY TRAINING

Several agencies have learned from hard experience that the success of efforts to provide leadership training to supervisors is contingent on support from those at the next level up. Cynthia D. McCauley and Christina A. Douglas of the Center for Creative Leadership comment, “Bosses are in the unique position of working directly with a manager, having regular contact, feeling responsible for the manager’s continued success, and having the power to access organizational resources for the manager.”<sup>37</sup> However, supervisory training is not always a high priority for those at the next level up. After NSA mandated leadership training for all first-line supervisors, the agency encountered some resistance from second-level managers. Glenn Leuschner of NSA explains that strong performance pressures were at the root of the problem, “They have mission goals; they don’t want to lose somebody for two weeks. It is difficult when you are on a war footing.”

Jeff Neal of DLA attributes the resistance of some second-level managers to the fact that these managers had not received such training themselves; “Some mid-level managers who received no training suddenly have subordinates getting wonderful training.” In response, DLA has extended the training designed for supervisors to second-level managers as well.

Partly as a means of gaining managerial support, DLA requires each supervisor to enter into a “partnership agreement” with his/her immediate superior. As part of the agreement, the second-level manager must agree to assist the supervisor in meeting the requirements of a Supervisor Certification Program and to “provide regular coaching and feedback on ways to build and strengthen leadership competencies.”<sup>38</sup>

FAA provides second-level managers with tools, training, and detailed guides for working with newly appointed supervisors. The second-level managers are also engaged in a formal process to certify each supervisor’s competence in core leadership areas at the completion of the probationary period.

<sup>35</sup> McCauley and Van Velsor, 18.

<sup>36</sup> McCauley and Van Velsor, 22.

<sup>37</sup> McCauley and Douglas, 93.

<sup>38</sup> DLA New Supervisor Certification Program Guide, 8.

According to Paul Meyer, Manager of Corporate Development Programs at FAA, “The role of a coach is a valuable way to structure that interaction. It is not self-exploration but looking at the job challenges as ways to develop targeted competencies.” At IRS, training participants share their learning plan with their manager after the classroom training ends. It helps individuals determine growth areas on which to focus.

#### ENSURE TOP LEADER COMMITMENT

The support of the top leader is vital for leadership development to take root. Jim Trinka says, “If it’s driven by the HR office, it will fall flat on its face.” Strong support from the top has been a characteristic of each of the exemplar programs identified here. Comptroller General David Walker of the Government Accountability Office and former IRS Commissioner Charles Rossotti are good examples of top leaders who provided that support. That said, there is often concern that when the original sponsor leaves, support will ebb and the program will flounder. It is less of a concern at GAO where the Comptroller General receives a 15-year term. IRS, CIA and NSA have each gone through a transition in leadership since their programs were created. Thus far, there has been continued support from the top at both the CIA and NSA. At IRS, budget difficulties initially impacted leadership development under Commissioner Rossotti’s successor, Mark Everson. However, the agency now uses a process that ties leadership development to the hiring of additional compliance positions. With this new process, resources will be available to train new first-line and senior managers in how to lead work groups. The result will be increased stability in the budgeting process.

The chances of sustaining support for leadership development efforts through a transition are enhanced when such support is forthcoming from other senior officials. One of the most effective means of securing the support of these leaders is to involve them in the program. As part of the process of developing its leadership competency model, a consultant hired by the IRS conducted “behavioral event” interviews with the agency’s top 35 leaders. The purpose was to identify the competencies required to achieve success within the agency. According to Jim Trinka, who directed that effort in his previous position as Director of Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness for the IRS, the interviews were critical in gaining top-level support for the program. The IRS also established a Leadership Development Executive Council, whose members provide guidance and support for all leadership programs.

At CIA, senior leaders serve as instructors for portions of the training. It is an effective means of acculturating new mid- and lower-level managers to the agency’s expectations, values and leadership philosophy. According to Barry Miller of CIA’s Leadership Academy, “Part of leadership is to develop and model for those moving into management roles.” Former General Electric CEO Jack Welch is proof of this model; he considered leadership development to be one of his most important responsibilities, spending as many as 20 days per year in training activities.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Welch, J., *Jack: Straight from the Gut*, Chapter 12.

## EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR FEDERAL SUPERVISORS

Proponents of supervisory training should be encouraged by recent legislative and regulatory actions that would address some of the needs identified in this report. Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management Chairman Daniel Akaka recently introduced the Federal Supervisory Training Act, which directs the creation of a program “to provide interactive instructor-based training to supervisors on actions, options and strategies a supervisor may use in developing and discussing relevant goals and objectives together with the employee; communicating and discussing progress relative to performance goals and objectives and conducting performance appraisals; mentoring and motivating employees and improving employee performance and productivity; and effectively managing employees with unacceptable performance.”<sup>40</sup>

The proposed legislation also calls for experienced supervisors to mentor new supervisors “by transferring knowledge and advice in areas such as communication, critical thinking, responsibility, flexibility, motivating employees teamwork and professional development.”<sup>41</sup>

In September 2006, OPM Director Linda Springer issued “Guidelines for Managerial Development” intended to “recommit the federal government to developing effective leaders ... from potential leaders and supervisors to higher-level managers and executives.”<sup>42</sup> Several of the provisions of this directive are consistent with the leadership development practices of the agencies featured in the report. For example, the memo states that agencies should promote, “Top-level commitment as demonstrated by dedicating adequate resources, by ensuring active involvement of higher-level officials in the development of their managerial subordinates, and by serving as positive role models, mentors and teachers for leadership.” The memo directs managers to incorporate the following elements in their leadership development approach:

- “Initial and periodic assessment of the leadership competencies of each supervisor, manager and executive, ideally with multiple sources of input. Assessments should also be done for employees identified as potential leaders.”
- “Training for new supervisors and managers to ensure they have completed development of basic

supervisory skills, including communicating expectations, and managing, evaluating, improving and rewarding employees’ performance.”

- “A broad range of learning methodologies grounded in experiential/action-oriented learning and relationship-based learning. This can include additional assignments and responsibilities structured for development purposes, coaching and mentoring assistance action learning projects, simulations, case studies, and other experientially oriented assignments.”

Collectively, these two initiatives represent an important shift by policy makers toward the training needs of first-line supervisors. Below are a number of recommendations that would further promote the objective of developing first-line leaders.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

#### RECOMMENDATION #1

CREATE A GOVERNMENT-WIDE SUPERVISORY  
“CORPS”

The National Academy of Public Administration calls first-line supervisors, “the federal government’s largest corporate leadership asset in sheer numbers and direct impact.”<sup>43</sup> The creation of a corps to include all federal supervisors would be a first step toward making sure that asset is recognized as such. The corps would provide a collective identity for the supervisors and would enhance prospects for achieving needed investments in training.

The creation of a government-wide corps would expand OPM’s influence over the leadership development training curriculum. The premise of the corps would be that to hold a supervisory position in the government, an individual would need to be certified as a member of the corps. OPM could set standards to which agencies would have to adhere in the form of specific curriculum requirements or OPM could require that prospective supervisors demonstrate specific competencies. The Office of Personnel Management has already identified the leadership competencies for which members would have to be trained (see Figure 1). In recognition of the need to allow each agency to tailor the training to its particular needs, OPM would have to allow some flexibility in the application of the standards.

<sup>40</sup> Senate Bill 967, 110th Congress.

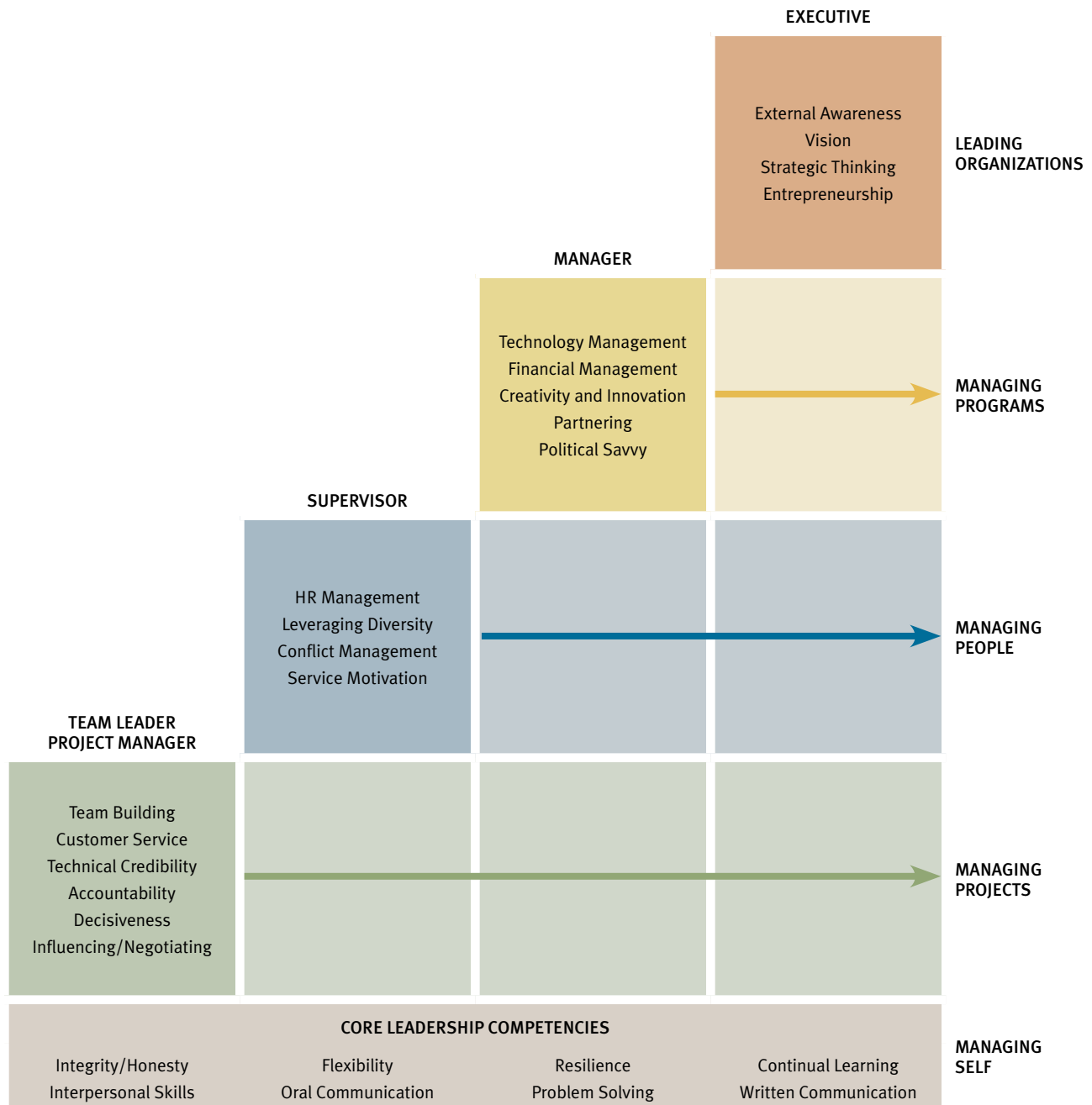
<sup>41</sup> Senate Bill 967.

<sup>42</sup> Linda Springer, Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Memo-  
randum for Chief Human Capital Officers: Guidelines for Managerial Develop-  
ment*, September 12, 2006.

<sup>43</sup> National Academy of Public Administration, 2.



FIGURE 1. THE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY “STAIR STEP” (CONTENT SOURCE: OPM)





**RECOMMENDATION #2****MANDATE LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR ALL SUPERVISORS**

The long-term purpose of a supervisory corps would be to ensure that all federal supervisors have leadership capabilities. This can be achieved both by selecting individuals with an aptitude for leading people and by providing those who are selected with effective training. Consistent with the capacity-building approach described above, all supervisors would be required to participate in such training. Each of the six agencies highlighted in this report mandates leadership training for either all supervisors or all new supervisors. Each migrated from what Paul Meyer of the FAA calls a “laissez-faire” approach to leadership development to a prescribed corporate curriculum with mandatory training.

Glenn Leuschner says that the decision to mandate supervisory training at NSA was controversial. There was a concern that those who were not motivated to participate would not get much out of it and might even detract from the experiences of others. Leuschner

says that the idea of mandatory training was further, “against the NSA culture.” However, the response to the policy has been positive. Many attendees say that had the training not been made mandatory, their superiors would not have allowed their participation.

Of DLA’s decision to mandate leadership training for all supervisors, Director of Human Resources Jeff Neal says, “It is more convincing to employees if it is made a mandatory program. Employees know we are not going to let people opt out.” According to Neal, another reason was simply that “many of the worst supervisors think they are good ... the worst-performing ones simply do not understand how bad they are.” Neal’s former boss, DLA director, and Vice Admiral Keith Lippert adds, “If we didn’t make it mandatory, we wouldn’t have got the participation. There are still a lot of people in denial that this is really a problem.”

The Defense Logistics Agency initially intended to provide training only to new supervisors. The Supervisor Certification Program (SCP), developed by a team of employees after extensive research and consultation with other agencies, included many of the leadership training elements discussed in this report: classroom

FIGURE 2. DEFENSE LOGISTICS AGENCY — NEW SUPERVISOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM\*

<p><b>PHASE 1: First 3 months following appointment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial Probationary Appointment Requirements**</li> <li>• Appointment Letter</li> <li>• Partnering Agreement</li> <li>• Position Description</li> <li>• Performance Standards</li> <li>• First Year Supervisor Certification Program IDP</li> <li>• Quarterly Progress Review Discussions begin</li> <li>• New Supervisor’s Toolkit</li> <li>• Certification Orientation—2 hours</li> <li>• DLA Online HRM Modules—12 hours</li> </ul> <p><b>PHASE 2: 3–12 months</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DLA Applied HRM for Supervisors Course—40 hours</li> <li>• LEAD Course and Assessments—40 hours</li> <li>• Quarterly Progress Review Discussions, continued</li> <li>• Probationary Period Assessment</li> <li>• Denison Multi-Source Feedback Orientation—1 hour</li> <li>• Denison Multi-Source Feedback Assessment (first survey)</li> </ul>	<p><b>PHASE 3: 12–18 months</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second Year Supervisor Certification Program IDP</li> <li>• One-on-One Coaching—4 hours</li> <li>• Ninth House Network—24 hours (continue in Phase 4)</li> <li>• Peer Coaching Introduced (voluntary participation, continue in Phase 4)</li> <li>• Serve as New Supervisor Sponsor</li> </ul> <p><b>PHASE 4: 18–24 months</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ninth House Network, continued</li> <li>• Individualized Self-Development Electives—24 hours</li> <li>• Peer Coaching, continued</li> <li>• Denison Multi-Source Feedback Assessment (second survey)</li> <li>• Post-Certification IDP</li> </ul>
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\* Available online at: (<http://www.dtc.dla.mil/LDship/TierII/Certification%20Prog%20Guide.doc>).

\*\* These are items discussed previously in the Supervisor Certification Program Guide section on Supervisor Probationary Period.

training, online training, multi-source feedback assessments, coaching, mentoring and self-development electives (see Figure 2). Initiated in 2004, the agency calculated that due to turnover they would eventually achieve 100 percent coverage. However, to the surprise of agency leaders, the program generated a demand by experienced supervisors for similar training. According to Director of Human Resources Jeff Neal:

Within a year [of the Supervisor Certification Program] we started getting complaints from people who hadn't had the opportunity to go through the program: "why can't I have this, I've been a supervisor for five years." The people in the program loved it. It is unusual to have a big training program like that rolled out and to have your biggest problem being that people want to get into it.

As a result of this demand, DLA decided that all supervisors, old and new, as well as second-tier managers, would be trained on an accelerated basis. Every supervisor in DLA receives a total of approximately 150 hours of leadership development training over a two-year period under the Supervisory Certification Program (SCP).

#### RECOMMENDATION #3

PROMOTE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT LEARNING AMONG AGENCIES

A primary purpose of a federal supervisory corps would be to mandate effective leadership training across the government. However, it is incumbent upon policy makers to acknowledge that this will be a learning process for most agencies. Each agency needs to be given the opportunity to test what will and what will not work in its environment. Some agencies may want to phase the training in, starting with new supervisors and gradually extending the training to existing supervisors. Others may want to mandate training for all supervisors from the start.

Agency-specific factors that could affect the configuration of a leadership development training program include the following:

- *Does the agency generate most of its own revenues?*  
One reason DLA has placed a premium on leadership development is that officials concluded that employee engagement is closely correlated with customer satisfaction. Most of DLA's revenues are generated through contracts with military services

organizations and hence customer satisfaction is a business necessity.

- *What is the agency culture?*

Law enforcement agencies generally do not place as much emphasis on employee considerations as non-law enforcement agencies. For example, FBI officials have not been enthusiastic about employee satisfaction surveys and multi-source feedback instruments.

- *Is the agency in a growth mode?*

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is in a growth mode as a result of renewed interest in nuclear energy. The agency will focus on ensuring that the new supervisors are prepared for their responsibilities.

Agencies can benefit greatly from the experiences of others, including those of the six agencies highlighted here. OPM could serve as a catalyst for the exchange of information as agencies experiment with different approaches to leadership training. Just as some agencies have organized managers into "communities of practice" for purposes of continuous learning, OPM could organize agencies into communities of practice to facilitate the mutual sharing of information and experiences.

Agencies that have developed extensive in-house expertise in leadership development training might be induced to provide that training to others under contract. The intelligence community has created a framework for cooperative training by identifying a common set of leadership competencies. The CIA has provided leadership training for the Marine Corps. Barry Miller of CIA University says the course used for the Marines is the same as that for CIA personnel except with different "scenarios."

#### RECOMMENDATION #4

PILOT THE SUPERVISORY "CORPS" CONCEPT AT THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

The leadership capacity of supervisors is likely to be a key determinant of the success of the new pay-for-performance systems at the departments of Defense (DoD) and Homeland Security (DHS). The supervisory corps concept should be piloted at these two agencies.

A recent article quotes one participant in the new National Security Personnel System (NSPS) at DoD as simply stating, "NSPS will be as good as the supervi-

sor.”<sup>44</sup> In focus groups conducted by DHS, employees expressed a lack of trust in the ability of the system to be administered fairly due to “inadequate skills of supervisors.”<sup>45</sup> The potential outcomes from implementing such systems with an unprepared group of supervisors include poor morale, increased turnover and additional grievances and equal employment complaints.

In recognition of the need to provide supervisors with leadership skills, Homeland Security’s Human Capital Operational Plan requires that all 13,000 managers receive performance management training. Forty percent of the training will be devoted to soft skills such as “collaborative communication skills,” “providing feedback and coaching” and “learning styles.” Yet, research and experience suggest that supervisors will need additional training if they are to acquire the required competencies. The existence of a set of OPM-sanctioned standards, justified on the basis of research and experience, could strengthen the department’s ability to secure the necessary resources.

The need for enhanced leadership training for supervisors is similarly apparent at DoD. There, training has largely been delegated to the individual components, including the departments of the Army, Navy, Air Force and the subordinate commands. In recent testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, a Navy official described their use of e-learning courses on topics such as change management, interpersonal communications, coaching and development to prepare supervisors and managers for their new responsibilities under NSPS. Some components have also launched a “train-the-trainer” effort whereby each management level is responsible for training those at the next level down.<sup>46</sup>

A concern is that the decision to delegate responsibility for training will lead to significant variation in the extent of supervisory preparation. An Air Force official acknowledged that supervisors in components with large numbers of civilian employees such as the Air Force Materiel Command receives more extensive training than those in combat units with small numbers of civilians.

Piloting the supervisory corps concept at these agencies can help policy makers answer questions such as the following:

1. Who should be included in a supervisory corps?
2. How can the need for a set of common training standards be accommodated with a need to provide units with a degree of autonomy in how those standards are achieved?
3. To what extent should OPM prescribe specific curriculum requirements or alternatively require that prospective supervisors demonstrate specific competencies?

#### RECOMMENDATION #5

REQUIRE THE USE OF METRICS TO ASSESS PROGRAM IMPACT

For purposes of assessing the outcomes of agency leadership development efforts, OPM should help identify metrics for assessing the programs. Similar to the situation with leadership training itself, there is likely to be a period of learning in this regard.

As noted by the Center for Creative Leadership, the outcomes of leadership development programs occur at the individual, group and organizational levels.<sup>47</sup> Individual level outcomes can be assessed through the use of course evaluations, interviews, the tracking of progress toward goals as set forth in individual development plans and multi-source feedback instruments. Group-level outcomes can be tracked using, “focus groups, group dialogue, tracking of team action plans and progress toward goals, observation of team meetings and interviews with the team coach about the progress of the team.”<sup>48</sup> To assess organization-level outcomes of leadership training, CCL endorses the use of organization climate and culture surveys as well as “workplace statistics,” such as turnover, absenteeism, training program attendance and performance appraisal ratings.<sup>49</sup> Many of the 28 agencies surveyed for this report rely on Donald Kirkpatrick’s Learning Evaluation Theory to evaluate training effectiveness.<sup>50</sup> Kirkpatrick identifies four “levels” of evaluation that include both individual and organizational outcomes:

44 Ziegler, M, “DoD Pay Reform Begins,” *FederalTimes.com* (May 11, 2006).

45 Forum Corporation of North America, presentation prepared for the Department of Homeland Security on *Performance Leadership: Performance Management Skills for Managers and Supervisors*.

46 Statement of Maureen Kleintop, Deputy Chief of Staff for Total Fleet Force Manpower and Personnel, U.S. Pacific Fleet before the Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia on Preparing for Transition Implementation of the National Security Personnel System, (April 12, 2006).

47 McCauley and Van Velsor, 241.

48 McCauley and Van Velsor, 257.

49 McCauley and Van Velsor, 261.

50 Kirkpatrick, Donald L., *Evaluating Training Programs*, American Society for Training and Development (1975).

- Level One—how the trainee felt about the learning experience
- Level Two—the increase in knowledge
- Level Three—the extent of applied learning back on the job and
- Level Four—the effect on the business

A Level One assessment involves feedback from training participants. A Level Two evaluation tests knowledge gained. To assess whether learning is applied on the job, organizations usually survey co-workers. Level Four assessments require more sophisticated methodologies. NSA's analysis of the return on investment from its executive coaching program provides an example.

The Defense Logistics Agency uses the collective results of the multi-source feedback to track the results of its training. The results for the first cohort in the Experienced Leader Development Program, shown in Figure 3, showed relatively little change in the self-report scores but significant change in the direct report scores. Jeff Curtis of DLA says, "We find this to be a positive, if initial, indication that we are reaping tangible positive benefits from our ELDP Tier II (New Supervisor) efforts."

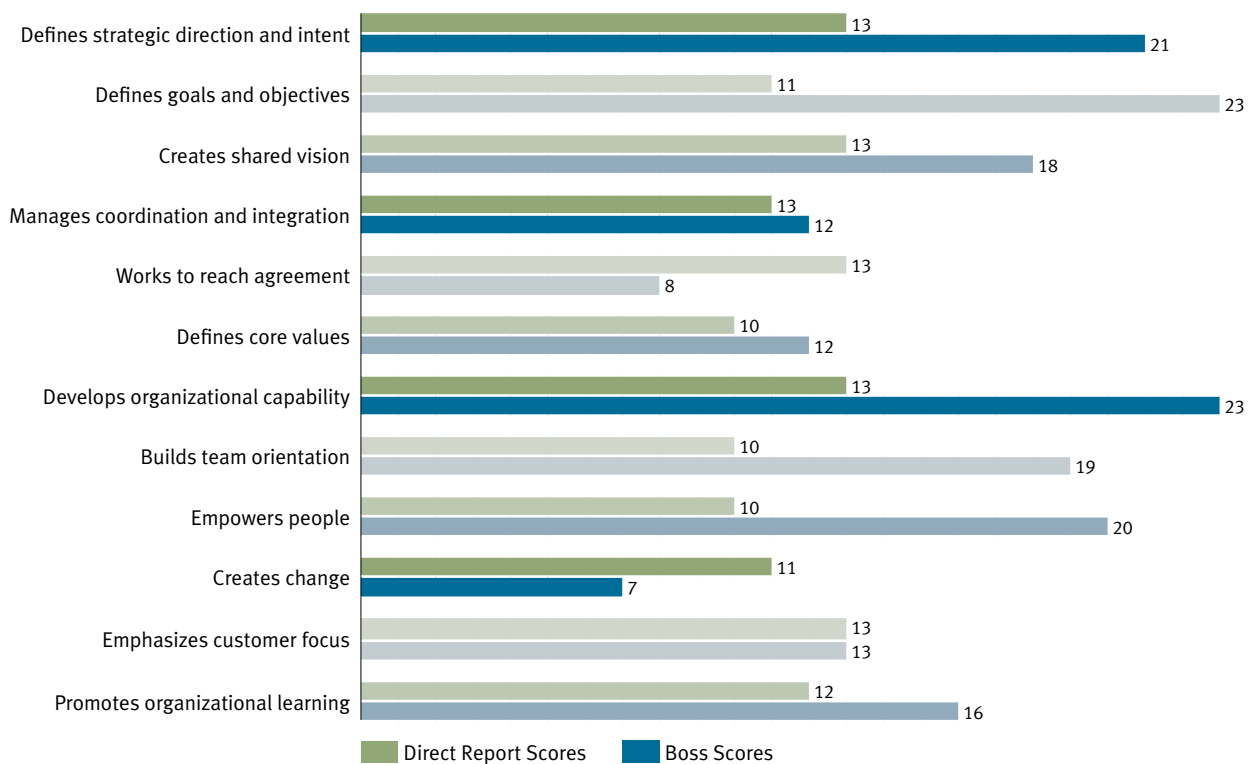
DLA also uses results from organizational culture and climate surveys to assess progress on its leadership development efforts. Surveys first conducted in 2003 convinced DLA of the need to provide leadership training to first-line supervisors in the first place. When compared with those of firms in the private sector, the survey results showed very low scores on items such as:

- "Most employees are highly involved in their work." (9 percent agree)
- "The capabilities of people are viewed as an important source of competitive advantage." (12 percent agree)
- "The leaders and managers 'practice what they preach.'" (15 percent agree)
- "Leaders set goals that are ambitious, but realistic." (18 percent agree)

Those results provide one set of benchmarks according to which DLA will assess progress in its leadership development efforts.

As part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2003, all federal agencies are required to conduct annual employee surveys. Such surveys are well suited to measure the leadership competencies of agency manag-

FIGURE 3. DLA: SUPERVISORY MULTI-SOURCE FEEDBACK RESULTS, PERCENTILE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REPEAT SURVEYS



ers and training outcomes. The FAA uses the data from its employee satisfaction survey to measure the impact of new managerial selection, training and performance management programs, and to identify areas requiring targeted training.

Surveys should be organization-wide in scope so that the relative performance of managers in different units can be compared. The results from exit surveys are also a good source of data as to the impact of supervisory quality: to what extent is poor quality of supervision a cause of departure? DLA closely tracks the aggregate results from the multi-source feedback instruments administered periodically to all management personnel to assess whether the training is having its intended impact. The first cohort to participate in this reoccurring assessment was recently reassessed and according to Jeff Neal, the majority of participants improved significantly.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AGENCY HEADS

##### RECOMMENDATION #1

HOLD EXECUTIVES ACCOUNTABLE FOR DEVELOPING THEIR SUBORDINATES

Glenn Leuschner of NSA argues that leadership development should be a professional expectation and that executives should be held responsible for developing their subordinates. Leuschner says, “If your organization does not prize and reinforce the development of its leaders, set clear performance expectations for senior managers to develop those below them ... if it is not a core responsibility of senior leaders, you’re blowing smoke.”

Leadership issues have taken on heightened importance at NSA as a consequence of 9/11 and the threat of terrorism. Traditionally, technical expertise was given priority in matters of promotion and reward. However, since 9/11, there has been recognition that managers must also have good interpersonal and communication skills if they are to comply with demands for enhanced collaboration among intelligence agencies.

OPM lists as one of its “Executive Core Qualifications” that members of the Senior Executive Service be competent in “assessing employees’ unique developmental needs and providing developmental opportunities that maximize employees’ capabilities and contribute to the

achievement of organizational goals; developing leadership in others through coaching and mentoring.”<sup>51</sup>

However, this requirement needs to be operationalized in a manner that makes explicit the executive behaviors expected in this regard. Managers and supervisors must constantly update and upgrade their skills to create a continuous learning environment. The Federal Human Capital Survey, and the agency-specific employee surveys required as part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2003, could provide valuable sources of data to assess results. Survey results could be tabulated in such a way as to provide individual executives with results for their units. Sample questions could include, “do supervisors believe that they have received adequate training?” and “do the employees believe that their supervisors are adequately trained?”

##### RECOMMENDATION #2

INTEGRATE LEADERSHIP CONSIDERATIONS INTO PERSONNEL PROCESSES

Leadership development programs are unlikely to have much impact on a stand-alone basis. If agencies are to help supervisors become leaders, changes are also needed in other personnel-related processes.

Several agencies, as well as the Office of Personnel Management, have developed leadership competency models as a means of integrating leadership considerations into different personnel processes. The IRS’s Leadership Competency Model includes 21 separate competencies all linked to individual and unit performance through the agency’s balanced measures system.<sup>52</sup> The competencies are used for purposes of selection, promotion, performance management and training. The FAA’s Managerial Success Profile includes 16 separate competencies grouped into four dimensions: Achieving Results, Leading People, Building Relationships and Leading Change. These factors are accorded a minimum 50 percent weight in all managerial selections, including first-level supervisors. The competencies underlie the core standards in managerial performance plans and provide structured probationary requirements for newly appointed managers.

Selection processes should also be adjusted in ways that enhance prospects for hiring individuals who will

51 U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Executive Core Qualifications*, available online at: (<http://www.opm.gov/ses/qualify.asp>).

52 See J.R. Thompson and H.G. Rainey, *Modernizing Human Resources Management in the Federal Government: The IRS Model*, IBM Center for the Business of Government (2002), Available online at: (<http://www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/ThompsonReport.pdf>).



be good leaders. One way of doing this is to explicitly include leadership considerations in the hiring process. Candidates for leadership positions at the IRS have to describe examples of situations in which they have exercised specific leadership competencies.

Several agencies have “what is it like to be a supervisor” sessions for employees who aspire to supervisory positions. NSA’s “emerging leaders” program provides information on what the job is like to individuals who are thinking of applying for supervisory positions. According to Glenn Leuschner of NSA, “A lot of people say this is not for me. ‘I didn’t know how hard it is to be a supervisor.’” Similarly, about one-third of participants in DLA’s “So You Want to Become a Supervisor” course decide it is not for them. According to Jeff Neal:

It allows people to select out. If we select the wrong person for a supervisory position, we are hurting three groups: the person who got the job — they won’t perform well and will be unhappy; the person who didn’t get the job; and the people who work for the supervisor. It is great if they recognize that they don’t want to be a manager. This course got huge reviews.”

#### RECOMMENDATION #3

CUSTOMIZE LEADERSHIP TRAINING BY AGENCY AND LEVEL

As noted above, some agencies have developed their own leadership competency models as a means of identifying the behaviors which are critical to success within that particular organization. This can be an expensive exercise, particularly when performed by an outside contractor. One argument against customization is that leadership competency models tend to include the same or similar competencies regardless of agency and there is little value to be gained by attempting to customize the model. On the other hand, there are advantages to going through the process of identifying those skills and abilities that are key to success in any particular environment.

There is also a question of whether, and to what extent, training needs vary according to organizational level. Several agencies rely on the “stair step” model (see Figure 1, pg. 12) which was developed by OPM and which lists the competencies specific to each level of management.

NSA’s version of this model includes 11 “core competencies” which are required of all employees as well as the additional competencies associated with each level

of management. In support of this approach, Jeff Neal of DLA argues:

The challenges of a first-line supervisor are different from those of an executive. I’m not dealing with an office full of GS-9s who are looking to me for guidance. I’m dealing with GS-15s who don’t need much guidance. My focus is more external to the organization than theirs is. A first-line supervisor’s focus is more internal, and to getting production out and to finding out what employees need to get their work done and to providing the support that they need.

#### RECOMMENDATION #4

TAKE A LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE ON PROGRAM COSTS

Many agencies are fiscally stressed and face many competing demands for resources. Left exclusively to the agencies, many would not make the investment necessary to provide the needed level of supervisory training. A reason for the creation of a supervisory corps is to take the issue to the next level out of conviction that a long-term pay-off from this investment will result.

DLA’s experience provides some insight in this regard. DLA has to raise its own revenue through the sale of materials and supplies to the armed services. Only a very small portion of the agency’s budget comes in the form of Congressional appropriations. In 2005, DLA experienced a budget squeeze as a result of fuel price guarantees provided to the armed services. There were serious budget pressures and some sentiment that leadership training be trimmed. However, Jeff Neal says that there was strong resistance to this suggestion from line managers. Neal cites a conversation he had with the commander of one of the DLA components in this regard:

When we were looking at budget cuts, someone asked, “what about cutting the Leadership Academy?” The commander in the Defense Distribution Center said, “I’ll cut almost every discretionary dollar in my budget before I’ll touch that program.” He is absolutely convinced that the only way to effect really dramatic change in an organization where your culture survey is ranking you in the third percentile is to change leadership.

Neal contends that the cost of the leadership development program is small relative to the prospective benefits:

Our workforce costs us over \$1 billion per year. We will spend \$2 million on leadership development training over the next year. It's dirt cheap. If you spend \$1 million developing leaders in a billion dollar workforce, it's an insignificant cost. If we could affect our cost recovery rate by one quarter percent, it would pay for the program 25 times over.

A similar argument holds with regard to the influence of enhanced leadership training on the quit rate of an organization's workforce. The cost of training an employee to become fully proficient in the business of any of these agencies can run to the tens of thousands of dollars. To the extent that poor supervision results in a higher quit rate, the savings from an investment in supervisory training could be substantial.

Despite the potential pay-offs, there is a continual need to identify efficiency improvements. CIA makes extensive use of internal trainers. Barry Miller of the CIA University says that experienced middle managers are brought in from the directorates on three-year assignments and taught how to teach. Miller says that in addition to holding down costs, there is a benefit in having instructors who are experienced in the core functions of the agency.

Several agencies are experimenting with the use of internal rather than external coaches. It is not uncommon for an agency to provide coaching support for its executives. However, such support is usually provided through a contract with an outside vendor and can be expensive. Due to budget restraints, very few agencies provide a similar service to their mid-level managers or first-line supervisors.

NSA's Leuschner would like to use internal coaches but is concerned about "the blind leading the blind." Also, the evaluation of NSA's executive coaching pilot states, "Leaders greatly appreciated having a coach from outside government to lend a fresh perspective to the issues being addressed and who had 'no ax to grind' or who had no role in the 'ratings chain.'" DLA found a cost-effective means of procuring outside coaches for its supervisors. Its vendor delivers the service via the telephone and Internet.

## CONCLUSION

The case for enhanced leadership development training for supervisors can be made at several levels. First is the business level: although agencies are still in the early stages of identifying methods for assessing the dollar impact of such training, quantitative and qualitative work that has been done and the opinions of those most closely associated with these programs point to a highly favorable return on investment. Second relates to management capacity and what NSA's Glenn Leuschner refers to as, "the health of the management chain." There is a compelling logic to the argument that the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. In many instances, that link is the supervisor. Leaders at many agencies have started to identify and remediate the problem. Third, as Jeff Neal of DLA points out: there is an ethical dimension to the issue. Neal says simply:

It's the right thing to do to give people leaders who can help them perform. The right thing to do and the good business decision happen to be the same thing. We see an enormous pay-off out of this.

## APPENDIX A

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FOR FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS IN SELECTED FEDERAL AGENCIES

Agency	Target			Training		Multi-source Feedback (MSF)	Developmental Relationships		Job Assignments	Continuous Learning/IDPs	Means of Evaluation				Additional Training at Component Level
	Aspiring Supervisors*	New Supervisors	Experienced Supervisors	Classroom	Online		Coaching	Mentoring			Kirkpatrick (levels)	Culture/Climate Survey	MSF results	Exit surveys	
CIA		O		+		+	+	+	+	+	1, 2, 3	+			+
Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services		M		+			+	+							
Coast Guard (civilian)		O	O	+	+			+							
DEA		M	M	+	+										
Homeland Security		M	M	+			+		+			+			+
Defense Logistics Agency		M	M	+	+	+	+		+	+		+	+	+	
EPA		M		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	1, 2, 3				
FAA		M		+	+	+	+		+	+	1, 2, 3	+			+
FAA			O	+	+	+	+		+	+	1, 2, 3	+			+
FBI	+			+	+				+	+	1, 3				
FBI		M		+	+				+	+	1, 3				
FBI			O	+	+				+	+	1, 3				
GAO		M		+	+				+	+					
GAO			O	+	+				+	+					
IRS	+			+	+	+		+	+	+	**				
IRS		M		+	+		+		+		1, 3				
IRS			O	+	+		+		+		1, 3				
Labor		M		+	+										+
NIST		O		+			+			+	1				
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	+			+	+	+	+	+	+	+	1				
Nuclear Regulatory Commission		M		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	1				
Nuclear Regulatory Commission			O	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	1				
National Security Agency		M	M	+	+	+				+	3	+	+		+
PBGC		M		+						+					
Bureau of Prisons		O		+		+		+							
Social Security Administration	+			+	+	+		+	+	+	1, 3				
Social Security Administration		M		+	+										+
U.S. Department of State	+			+	+	+	+	+	+	+					
U.S. Department of State		M		+	+	+	+	+	+	+					
U.S. Department of State			M	+	+	+	+	+	+	+					
U.S. Marshal's Service		O	O	+											
Veterans Benefits Administration	+			+		+		+	+	+	1, 2, 3				
Veterans Benefits Administration		M		+		+				+	1, 2, 3				
Western Area Power Administration	+			+		+		+	+	+					

Agencies in which most supervisory training takes place at the component level: NASA, Air Force, VHA

M - Mandatory, O - Optional

\* Plus sign (+) indicates that agency offers training for aspiring supervisors; participants must apply to participate.

\*\* The IRS evaluates its program by tracking the percentage of participants that are promoted.



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