



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

Employee Services

Monday, May 21, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR: HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTORS

FROM: MARK D. REINHOLD, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, EMPLOYEE SERVICES

Subject: Federal Supervisory Training Program Survey Results

I am pleased to present the key findings of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) recently administered Federal Supervisory Training Program Survey. This memorandum highlights information on the current state of agencies' training programs for new and experienced supervisors and provides recommendations on how to improve supervisory training program curriculums. Effective, skilled supervisors set and communicate performance expectations, provide regular, ongoing performance feedback, and foster a high-performance culture. To fulfill these responsibilities, organizations must offer supervisors a wide array of developmental opportunities that equip them with the appropriate knowledge and skills.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) Federal Workforce Report, [Improved Supervision and Better Use of Probationary Periods Are Needed to Address Substandard Employee Performance \(GAO-15-191\)](#), contained the following recommendation: "To help ensure supervisors obtain the skills needed to effectively conduct performance management responsibilities, assess the adequacy of leadership training that agencies provide to supervisors*." In response, OPM conducted a survey to collect information on the current state of agencies' leadership training programs for new and experienced supervisors. OPM analyzed the responses to this survey, along with information from a review of the supervisory development literature, to provide the following Governmentwide recommendations on how to improve supervisory training program curriculum(s):

- Every supervisory training program should begin with specific business requirements.
- Agencies should build leadership capability at all levels to support effective succession management.
- Agencies should take a broader approach to supervisory training and continue using [OPM's Federal Supervisory and Managerial Frameworks and Guidance](#).
- New and experienced supervisors should have Individual Development Plans (IDPs) to improve organizational and individual accountability of training requirements.
- Agencies should develop an evaluation strategy that aligns with the organizational strategy to obtain more robust and meaningful contributions to agency outcomes.

These recommendations support agencies' plans to maximize Federal employee performance, as required in the Office Management and Budget memorandum (M-17-22), [Comprehensive Plan for Reforming the Federal Government and Reducing the Federal Civilian Workforce](#).

BACKGROUND

The GAO-15-191 objective was to examine the rules and trends relating to the review and dismissal of employees for poor performance. Federal agencies' ability to address poor performance has been a longstanding issue**. OPM concurred with the GAO-15-191 recommendation to work with stakeholders to assess the adequacy of leadership training for supervisors.

It should be noted that all agencies must provide training within one year of an employee's initial appointment to a supervisory position and follow up at least every three years, on the use of appropriate actions, options, and strategies to:

- Mentor employees;
- Improve employee performance and productivity;
- Conduct employee performance appraisals in accordance with agency appraisal systems; and
- Identify and assist employees with unacceptable performance***.

METHODOLOGY

OPM's Supervisory Training Program Survey was sent to agency Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs) in late 2016. The web-based survey consisted of 15 questions, organized into three sections: Planning and Strategy, Development and Delivery, and Evaluation.

CHCOs coordinated survey completion with the appropriate agency officials (e.g., Human Resources Directors, Training Directors, and Chief Learning Officers) responsible for managing and administering the agency's supervisory training program. Of the 69 completed surveys, over 66 percent were submitted by the agency's Chief Learning Officer (CLO) or Training Manager/Officer representing 26 Federal agencies and bureaus.

RESULTS

Agencies design and deliver comprehensive training curriculums for New Supervisors, but offer disproportionate training at other leadership levels.

According to survey participants, it is more common for each of the four mandatory training topics, per 5 CFR 412, to be available for New Supervisors, than they are for Experienced Supervisors. 84 percent of survey participants indicated their agency's New Supervisory training program curriculum included the mandatory training topics. However, only 63 percent of survey participants indicated their agency included the mandatory training topics in Experienced Supervisory training programs.

Additionally, survey participants were asked whether they provided training and development for the additional recommended topics and leadership competencies included in OPM's Federal Supervisory and Managerial Frameworks. On average, agencies indicated that the topics were included in New Supervisors training program curriculums than in experienced supervisor curriculums. Sixty-nine percent of survey participants indicated they included recommended HR-related technical knowledge and leadership competencies in New Supervisors training program curriculums, and only 54 percent included the recommended topics in Experienced Supervisors training program curriculums. Aspiring Leader/Team Lead training curriculums on average incorporated significantly fewer (27 percent) of the recommended training topics and competencies.

Survey participants were also asked to indicate the type of learning interventions offered for each of the following leadership levels: Aspiring Leaders/Team Lead, New Supervisors, and Experienced Supervisors. The top four interventions offered in all leadership curriculums were the same: on-site classroom/in-person courses, passive web/computer-based instruction, off-site classroom/in-person courses, and workshops. The most notable difference was in the fifth most commonly offered learning intervention. Coaching was primarily offered to Experienced Supervisors and mentoring was primarily offered to Aspiring Leaders/Team Leads and New Supervisors. OPM encourages agencies to provide coaching services as a supplement to leadership development efforts at all levels because it is considered one of the most effective leadership development interventions****. Furthermore, coaching can improve Federal supervisors' interpersonal skills thereby enhancing the supervisor-employee relationship and ultimately maximizing employee performance.

Agencies continue to leverage probationary periods and IDPs as supervisory training accountability mechanisms.

Employees are required by 5 CFR 315.904(a) to serve a probationary period prescribed by the agency upon an initial appointment to a supervisory and/or managerial position. Agencies may establish requirements on what constitutes satisfactory completion of a probationary period, including completion of a new supervisory training program. Approximately 80 percent of survey participants indicated their agency included completion of new supervisory training as part of these requirements. Such a requirement promotes organizational and individual accountability of new supervisory mandatory training.

Although formal development plans are only required for executive employees (5 CFR 412.401(a)), 41 percent of survey participants indicated they require all supervisors to complete IDPs, and another four percent indicated it is required only of new supervisors. Supervisors and their managers should work together to outline developmental goals and select appropriate training to meet mandatory training requirements and developmental needs. Additionally, supervisors and their managers are encouraged to use [OPM's Effective Learning Interventions for Developing Executive Core Qualifications](#) to identify a range of interventions most suited to the individual and a specific competency.

Agencies use of evaluation techniques and tools to measure the impact of supervisory training is limited.

5 CFR 410 requires agencies to annually evaluate their training programs to determine the programs' contributions to mission accomplishment and organizational performance goals. Approximately 72 percent of survey participants indicated they evaluate their agencies' supervisory training programs. The top five metrics used to evaluate included: satisfaction level of the training, number of supervisors trained, supervisor satisfaction levels, number of courses delivered, and change in knowledge, attitudes, and skills specific to the courses delivered. These top five metrics only reflect activities, reaction, and learning, as opposed to the application of the learned skills and impact. These metrics cannot be used to determine the adequacy of a supervisory training program or its meaningful contribution to agency outcomes. Agencies are encouraged to determine where supervisory training belongs in the overall business strategy. Supervisory training that is woven into the business strategy contributes measurable and meaningful changes in business processes, systems, people, and the agency culture.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the Federal Government requires supervisory training, the development, implementation, and evaluation of these types of training programs have been left to the discretion of the individual agencies. Agencies have the flexibility to implement learning and development requirements and recommendations, in consideration of mission needs and funding availability. As a result, there is inconsistent delivery and availability of supervisory training across agencies. To improve accessibility, adequacy, and effectiveness of supervisory training, OPM recommends:

- Every supervisory training program should begin with specific business requirements. Agencies should design and evaluate supervisory training programs with the lines of business that will be impacted by the training. The learning opportunities should align with the organizational needs, knowledge risk, and be designed to demonstrate increased proficiency aligned with an employee's career progression from an Aspiring Leader/Team Lead through an Experienced Supervisor.
- Agencies build leadership capability at all levels to support effective succession management. Agencies should provide additional training opportunities for Aspiring Leaders/Team Leads on HR-related technical knowledge and leadership competencies. This will reduce the need for intensive training after an employee receives his/her first supervisory role.
- Agencies take a broader approach to supervisory training and continue using [OPM's Federal Supervisory and Managerial Frameworks and Guidance](#) as they design supervisory training curriculum, complete competency needs assessment, develop training solutions, and ensure compliance with training requirements.
- New and Experienced Supervisors have IDPs to improve organizational and individual accountability of training requirements, improve current job performance, and measure their development progress. IDPs strengthen organizational health by aligning supervisory training and development efforts with the agency's mission, goals, objectives, and performance management system to address developmental areas. A strategic IDP process produces agile supervisors capable of recalibrating to meet the demands of constant organizational and enterprise-wide change.

•Agencies develop an evaluation strategy that aligns with the organizational strategy to obtain more robust and meaningful contributions to agency outcomes. Useful evaluations will result in increased capacity, consistently dedicated resources, and evidence-based program decisions.

If you have any questions regarding the Federal Supervisory Training Program Survey, please contact Julie Brill (Julie.Brill@opm.gov) or Yadira Guerrero (Yadira.Guerrero@opm.gov).

cc: Chief Human Capital Officers, Deputy CHCOs

[*Improved Supervision and Better Use of Probationary Periods Are Needed to Address Substandard Employee Performance \(GAO-15-191\)](#)

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[***5 CFR 412.202\(b\)](#)

[****U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Executive Development Best Practices Guide. November 2012.](#)