

National Performance Review Employee Survey Results

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The National Performance Review Survey was administered in August and the results (Government wide) are now in and posted on the NPR website with a letter from Vice President Gore. The website is <http://www.npr.gov/library/misc/survey.html>

Survey Backs Gore's Long-Haul View of 'Reinvention'

Vice President Gore has consistently argued that at least a decade would be needed before "reinventing government" took hold inside the bureaucracy, and a survey that he recently sponsored of federal employees appears to back him up.

Only 35 percent of the workers responding to the vice president's survey said they believed their agencies make reinvention an "important priority." Only a quarter indicated they understood "how good performance is defined in your organization."

The survey marks the first time Gore has tried to measure employee attitudes toward his government reform effort since it began in 1993. The results will be presented today at a meeting of the National Partnership Council, the White House advisory group on federal labor-management relations. Gore launched his project to make the government "work better and cost less" after taking office in 1993 with President Clinton, who had promised in his campaign for the White House to shrink the size of government while improving its performance.

Since 1993, the administration has cut the federal work force by almost 15 percent, or about 300,000 jobs. Gore, meanwhile, urged federal agencies to improve their "customer service," accept unions as partners and eliminate red tape.

Some of the survey results undoubtedly disappoint Gore. Only 13 percent said their agencies have streamlined procedures for hiring, 20 percent said employee travel regulations have been simplified and just 25 percent view their managers and unions as working cooperatively on problems.

But not all of the poll returns were bleak: 75 percent reported their agencies have set goals to improve service to taxpayers, 62 percent said they were satisfied with their jobs and 57 percent said they have "electronic access" to information needed to do their job.

Gore policy adviser Morley A. Winograd said the survey shows "significant progress on the issue of employees focusing on customer service."

Among the 35 percent of employees who work at agencies where reinvention has been a top priority, 91 percent said goals exist to meet "customer expectations" and 65 percent indicated procedures have been adopted so they can respond to citizen complaints.

These same employees also believe their opinions count for more in the workplace and that they are given more freedom in how to go about their work. But, in keeping with other federal workers surveyed, they gave lower marks to efforts aimed at reducing internal red tape.

The survey, with 33 questions, was mailed to a random sample of 34,401 employees in 48 federal agencies. Forty percent responded to the survey, which was developed by a team from the Office of Personnel Management, Merit Systems Protection Board, Federal Aviation Administration and Gore's National Partnership for Reinventing Government.

In some respects, Gore's survey reaffirms previous data on federal workers. A 1996 merit board survey, published this year, found 37 percent of respondents believed reinvention goals were important priorities at their agencies. Only 20 percent, though, said the Gore effort had "a positive impact on bringing change to the government."

The vice president's staff said survey data on specific agencies would not be released because of statistical concerns related to the response rate. But Gore shared some of it last week during a stop in Kansas City, praising the Department of Housing and Urban Development for finishing first among agencies where reinvention is a top priority.

Other top agencies, officials said, included the General Services Administration, Office of Personnel Management, National Aeronautics and Space Administration and Small Business Administration.

Donald F. Kettl, a Brookings Institution scholar who has followed Gore's reinvention effort, said the survey results showed "the unevenness of how reinventing government has penetrated the federal government. . . . There is one vice president speaking at the top, but it has been absorbed into different federal agencies very differently."

Kettl and others yesterday gave Gore credit for authorizing the survey, especially as he prepares for a presidential campaign. "It's a gutsy move to ask the questions, knowing well in advance that not everyone thinks this reinvention is a good idea," Kettl said.

Winograd said Gore would send the survey results to federal employees and discuss them with the heads of 32 agencies next week. "We can make the federal workplace a great place to work . . . but we do need more energy and attention to the task of reinventing," Winograd said.

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