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YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER:

Resilient Work Cultures and Resilient Workforces Go Hand in Hand

Even in the best of times, the federal workforce negotiates immense pressure to achieve their missions. Add in the uncertainty that surrounds a divisive external political environment, and you have the powerful potential for mission disruption.

Because uncertainty has an impact on a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, its effects can become a real problem if left unchecked—particularly when the outside world begins to color how coworkers interact with each other. The Society for Human Resource Management's recently released survey, **A Workforce Divided: The Alarming Rise of Politics at Work**, found that 42 percent of U.S. employees have personally experienced political disagreements in the workplace.

To operate at peak form, the federal workforce must be resilient in the face of many micro and macro daily stressors. Building resilience improves morale, productivity, retention, and recruitment. It is how the workforce will shake off what's extraneous and maintain focus on what moves the mission forward.

Federal managers can't control outside events, but the workplace is a much smaller world. And by developing a workplace culture that structures, supports, and grows resilience, managers can exert positive influence over the things that matter.

What Resilience Means

Resilience means adapting well in the face of pressure. In the workplace, it's the ability to continue on your path to mission objectives, regardless of what the outside world throws at you.

FEDERAL MANAGERS HAVE A JOB TO DO...IF FEDERAL WORKERS ARE TO DO THEIR JOBS

Luckily, we humans are masters of resilience—and we can get even better at it with the right guidance and supports. The American Psychological Association says that “resilience... involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.”

It would certainly be convenient if workforce disruption ebbed and flowed based on elections, but that doesn't happen. External distractions of all types happen at all times. The takeaway for federal managers should be that the more chaotic the macro external environment, the more important the decisive actions they take become.

Building resilience is bigger than one-time initiatives. Resilience has to be baked into the federal work culture and into the mindset and behaviors of every person. Federal managers that set the tone and boundaries to keep the work culture promoting a mission-positive environment create the most successful teams.

How? Federal managers can start building a culture of resilience by fully integrating the four c's of work culture and workforce resilience: **connectedness, communication, career supports, and consistency.**

THE FOUR C'S OF WORK CULTURE AND WORKFORCE RESILIENCE



Connectedness

Reinforce the connection to the mission.



Focus on understanding what everyone does to play their part in achieving the mission.



Discuss the individual behaviors that embody the way the organization wants to be. Put respect and integrity front and center in dealings with each other.



Strengthen the message about positive behaviors and their ties to positive outcomes by making these stories a part of regular discussions with the workforce.





Communication

Give people a chance to communicate what they feel.

Federal workplaces suffer from lack of trust. Eagle Hill's 2019 survey, **Mismatched Priorities, Unmet Expectations: The State of Organizational Culture in Federal Government** found that only 61 percent of respondents trust their direct supervisor. And more federal employees distrust their executive leadership (40 percent) than trust them (38 percent).

Effective managers can constructively address potential trust issues through engaged and respectful communication. That means:



Keep the door open. Allow people to feel safe in expressing frustrations about the things that are impeding them and enlist their input to do something about it.



You don't have to have the answers right away, but you have to show that people are listened to and valued. Listen with empathy, respect, and full attention.



Acknowledge negative feelings but emphasize the positive reality. Today's crisis is tomorrow's history. People can overcome all kinds of adversity by consciously choosing and applying resilient behaviors to get the job done.



Career Supports

Understand what your people want and help them get it.

Make time to understand what people really want—not just long-term career goals, but in everyday terms (experiences they want to have, skills they want to learn, things they want to improve in themselves). Then provide the appropriate professional development and training. That means:



Remember, not everyone wants to rocket up the same ladder.



Find the sweet spot between people's individual goals and strengths and what will accomplish the mission. Divide work tasks accordingly.



Help build close, secure connections among your people by developing peer groups, mentoring opportunities, and cross-functional/cross-level interactions. A workplace culture's biggest influences are the interpersonal relationships we have.



Celebrate individual successes and milestones as a group. But when celebrating, remember to communicate the story of why the celebration is important. Reinforce what about the individuals' special talents, qualities, or points of view proved so valuable in the success.



Look after your employees' physical, emotional, and mental health needs. Understand and highlight for them all available support systems and look to create new ones. These supports can be inexpensive; some examples include seminars in negotiating conflict, meditation/nutrition, lunchtime walking clubs, or contests to promote healthy habits.



Consistency

Model resilient behavior at all levels.

EHC's 2019 survey, **Mismatched Priorities, Unmet Expectations: The State of Organizational Culture in Federal Government** found that 72 percent of federal employees say they feel proud to work for their organization. That's a powerful platform for unity.

Federal managers can build on this platform by modeling the behaviors that create a culture that sustains enthusiasm for the mission, even in the face of inevitable political ebbs and flows. For example:



Find the opportunities inherent in changes and frame challenges in optimistic terms.



Recognize your personal limits and tap into other people's strengths, particularly when they are different from your own. There is real strength in reaching out to others for help and real value in showing others you respect the power of teamwork.



Be positive: express gratitude to others, be able to laugh at your own limitations, acknowledge when mistakes happen but move quickly to discussion of the path forward.



Keep workforce diversity in all its forms a strength by underscoring what binds the workforce: the goals they are working on as a group and the individual perspectives and talents that move the group toward those goals.

THE STATE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FOUND THAT **72%** OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES SAY THEY FEEL *proud to work* FOR THEIR ORGANIZATION.

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