



2013 BEST PLACES TO WORK IN THE
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT® ANALYSIS

Positioned for Change

UNDERSTANDING

STAFF/MANAGER ALIGNMENT

When there are considerable disparities between the views of managers and their employees on a range of issues, it is likely that these groups are experiencing the workplace quite differently. For those agencies looking to drive change, this may suggest employees are not aligned with management on some of the significant challenges facing the organization and how to address them.

It is common for managers to view their organizations more positively than staff. Managers typically have more information and influence on decisions that impact their work. But it is important for agency leaders to identify any extreme differences in viewpoints and understand the reasons for the disagreements. Improving the staff/manager alignment alone will not solve workplace problems, but an analysis of the divergent views should be used as a tool in the process of improving employee satisfaction and commitment. Bringing staff and managers into closer agreement on workplace issues can improve agency leaders' ability to implement change.

In this *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*® snapshot, the Partnership for Public Service and Deloitte analyzed staff/manager alignment from government-wide and agency vantage points. The staff/manager alignment measures areas of agreement and disagreement between employees and their bosses based on a review of 44 questions asked in the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) 2013 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

GOVERNMENT-WIDE RESULTS

Government-wide, there is a high level of agreement between managers and staff in the belief that the work they do is important, that the workforce has the job-relevant knowledge and skills to accomplish agency goals, and that supervisors are supportive of employee work-life balance. On the other hand, there is a wide divergence of views on the issues of merit-based promotions, leadership fairness and whether employees are rewarded for good work.

Sometimes staff and managers share similar views, but those perceptions can be negative. For example, both employees and managers are skeptical that their work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills. The same is the case for training, with only about five in 10 managers and employees agreeing that training needs are adequately assessed. These findings indicate that both staff and managers think these issues are problems and would be open to change in practice or policy in the areas of recruitment and training.

Although staff and managers do not have positive views on these issues, it is good news that they agree these are challenges facing the organization.

Government-wide, the biggest difference centers on whether promotions are based on merit—47.2 percent of managers agree this is the case compared with just 25.9 percent of employees. The next two largest gaps in perceptions involve the questions dealing with fairness in leadership practices (an 18.2-point gap between staff and managers) and whether supervisors give employees a chance to dem-

onstrate their leadership skills (a 17-point gap). This large difference may be due to poor communication between staff and managers around leadership development, or a lack of opportunities for employees.

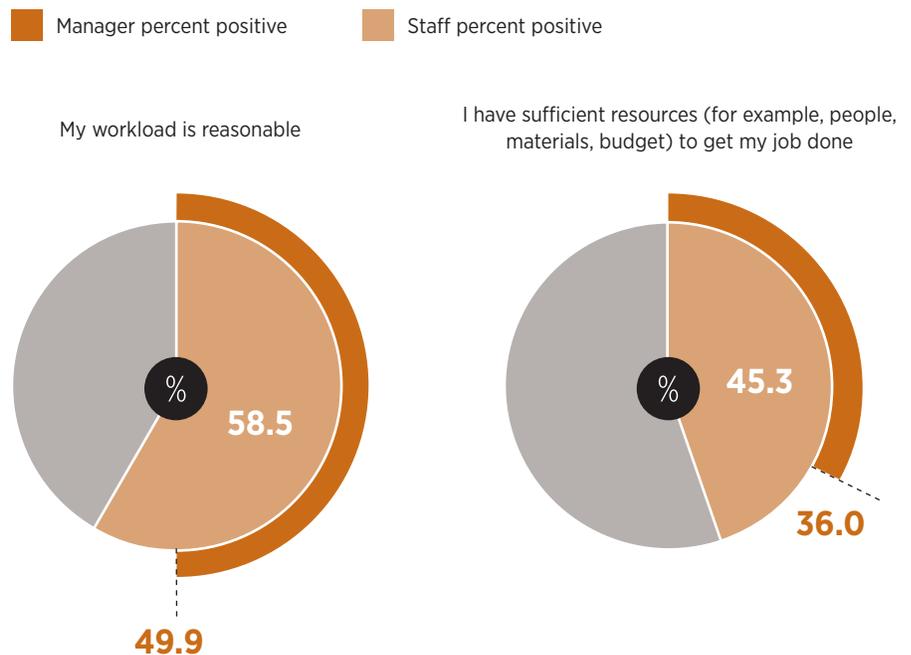
On another critical workplace issue, nearly six out of 10 managers believe that employees are rewarded for high quality work, while only about four out of 10 employees feel that this is true. Potential causes of this could be that the types of rewards managers are offering are not resonating with employees, or managers are not taking the time to recognize and reward good work.

Both managers and staff also are dissatisfied with the way govern-

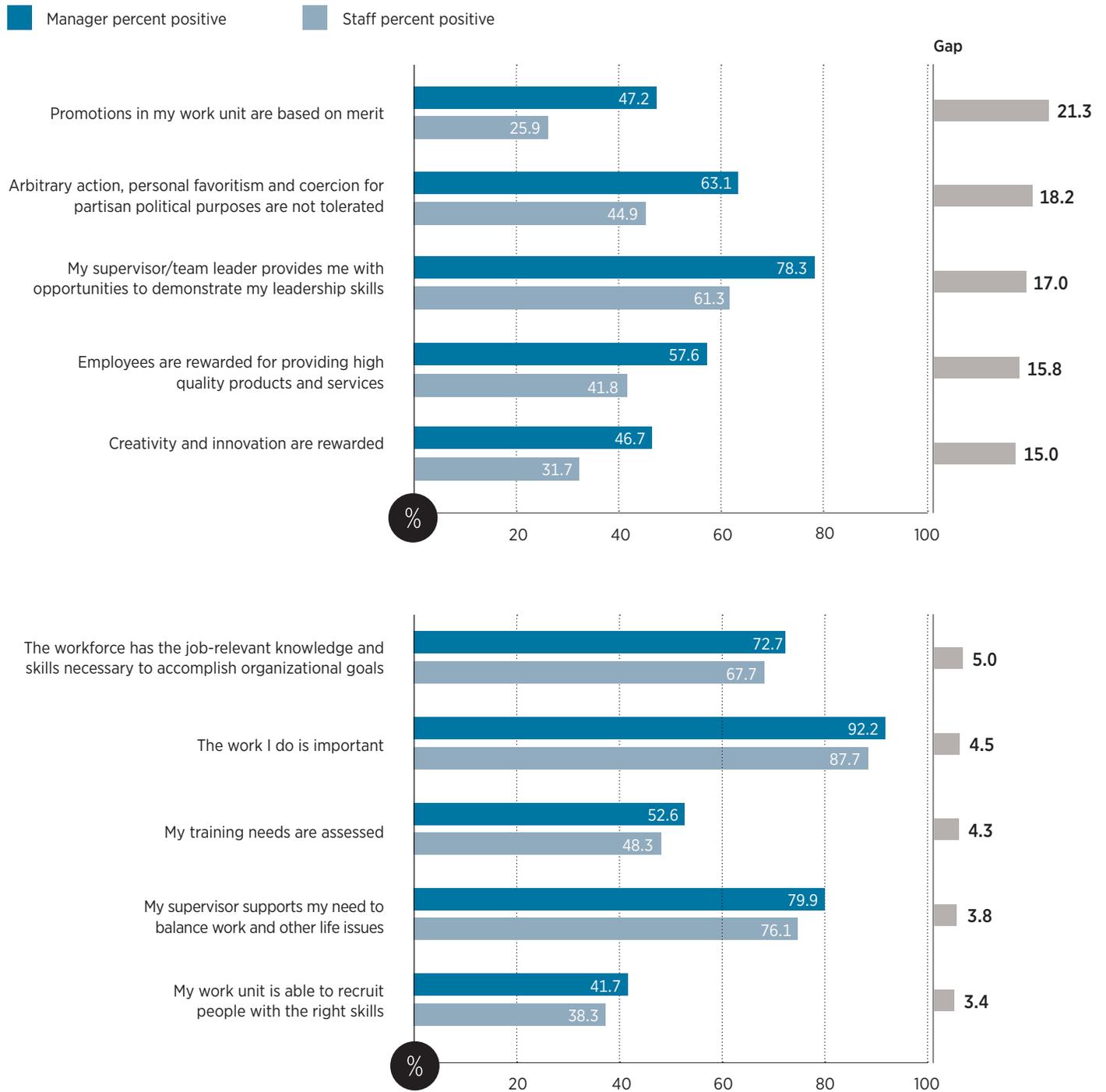
ment rewards creativity and innovation. While 46.7 percent of managers believe that creativity and innovation are rewarded, only 31.7 percent of employees agree.

Of the 44 questions included in this *Best Places to Work* analysis, staff responded more positively than managers in only two instances. More employees feel that their workloads are reasonable (an 8.6 point gap between staff and managers), and that they have sufficient resources to get their jobs done (a 9.3 point gap). These findings could indicate that managers are feeling a great deal of stress in trying to accomplish their mission goals with limited resources.

Two questions where government-wide staff perceptions are more positive than managers



Largest and smallest staff/manager gaps government-wide



AGENCY RESULTS

One way to assess the well-being of a federal workplace is to look at the differences of opinions between employees and managers at individual agencies and compare that information to government-wide results. If agency differences are substantial on a range of critical workplace issues compared to the government-wide averages, it may be a cause for concern and worth examining. If employees and managers at individual agencies are closely aligned on issues and have scores better than the government-wide norm, it may be a sign of productive and healthy work environment. Even if they are below the government average, but are closely aligned on what they view as key challenges for the agencies, they are better positioned to make workplace improvements.

We create staff/manager alignment scores for agencies by looking at the differences between the views of their employees and managers and comparing those to government-wide results. Overall staff/manager alignment scores can range from +44 to -44. Agencies with negative scores

are less aligned, while agencies with positive scores have greater alignment between staff and managers and are therefore better positioned for instituting change in the workplace. By comparing staff/manager alignment scores to an agency's overall *Best Places to Work* index score, which measures employee satisfaction and commitment, we can better understand the risks associated with lower levels of staff/manager alignment. Agencies with low *Best Places to Work* index scores may be eager to make improvements in their workplaces, but low staff/manager alignment scores could cause their change efforts to falter.

The alignment results show that some agencies struggling with low overall *Best Places to Work* scores, such as the National Archives and Records Administration and the National Labor Relations Board, must also overcome a wide divergence of views in the way managers and staff view basic workforce issues. Knowing this and the specific areas of disagreement can have important implications for leaders looking to implement improvements in employee satisfaction and commitment.

In contrast, better-than-average alignment at agencies like the Department of Agriculture and the Broadcasting Board of Governors suggests that these agencies may be better positioned to address relatively low *Best Places to Work* index scores.

There also are a few surprises among agencies with traditionally strong *Best Places to Work* scores. Those with solid *Best Places to Work* scores but lower-than-expected alignment include Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Federal Trade Commission. While these agencies currently perform well in the *Best Places to Work* rankings, low levels of alignment could still act as a barrier to any future efforts to make improvements.

Several agencies have high *Best Places to Work* and staff/manager alignment scores. Two agencies, the Departments of State and Commerce, ranked among the top five large agencies in the 2013 *Best Places to Work* rankings and also had two of the highest alignment scores among large and mid-size agencies.

Agency Best Places to Work index scores and staff/manager alignment scores for large and mid-size agencies

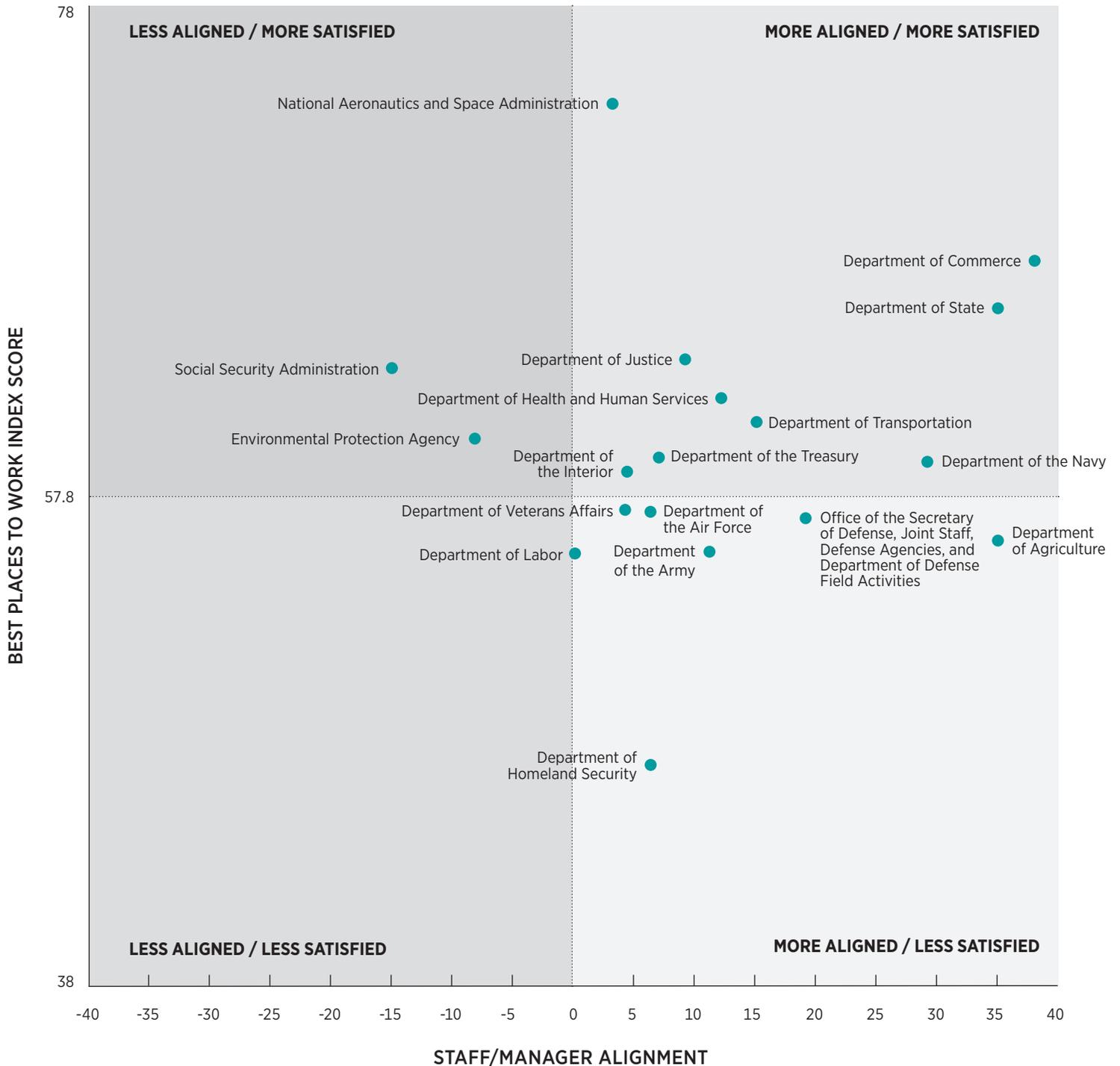
AGENCY	AGENCY TYPE	BEST PLACES TO WORK INDEX SCORE	STAFF/MANAGER ALIGNMENT SCORE
Department of Commerce	Large	67.6	38
Department of Agriculture	Large	56.1	35
Department of State	Large	65.6	35
Department of the Navy	Large	59.3	29
Federal Communications Commission	Mid-size	71.3	25
U.S. Agency for International Development	Mid-size	58.9	24
Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, Defense Agencies, and Department of Defense Field Activities	Large	57.0	19
General Services Administration	Mid-size	63.5	17
Broadcasting Board of Governors	Mid-size	50.7	17
Department of Transportation	Large	60.9	15

AGENCY	AGENCY TYPE	BEST PLACES TO WORK INDEX SCORE	STAFF/MANAGER ALIGNMENT SCORE
Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency	Mid-size	58.5	12
Department of Health and Human Services	Large	61.9	12
Department of the Army	Large	55.6	11
Department of Justice	Large	63.5	9
Department of the Treasury	Large	59.5	7
Department of the Air Force	Large	57.2	6
Department of Homeland Security	Large	46.8	6
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	Mid-size	73.8	6
Department of the Interior	Large	58.9	4
Department of Veterans Affairs	Large	57.3	4
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	Large	74.0	3
Small Business Administration	Mid-size	57.4	2
Department of Energy	Mid-size	58.0	1
Department of Labor	Large	55.6	0
Federal Trade Commission	Mid-size	73.8	-4
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Mid-size	43.2	-4
Office of Personnel Management	Mid-size	67.6	-5
Environmental Protection Agency	Large	59.3	-8
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission	Mid-size	71.6	-13
Social Security Administration	Large	63.0	-15
National Labor Relations Board	Mid-size	56.8	-22
National Credit Union Administration	Mid-size	65.8	-23
National Science Foundation	Mid-size	62.8	-24
Department of Education	Mid-size	57.6	-25
National Archives and Records Administration	Mid-size	47.1	-26
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission	Mid-size	59.5	-29
Securities and Exchange Commission	Mid-size	58.7	-36
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	Mid-size	82.3	--
Government Accountability Office	Mid-size	74.4	--
Intelligence Community	Large	67.3	--
Smithsonian Institution	Mid-size	77.2	--
Government Printing Office	Mid-size	64.2	--

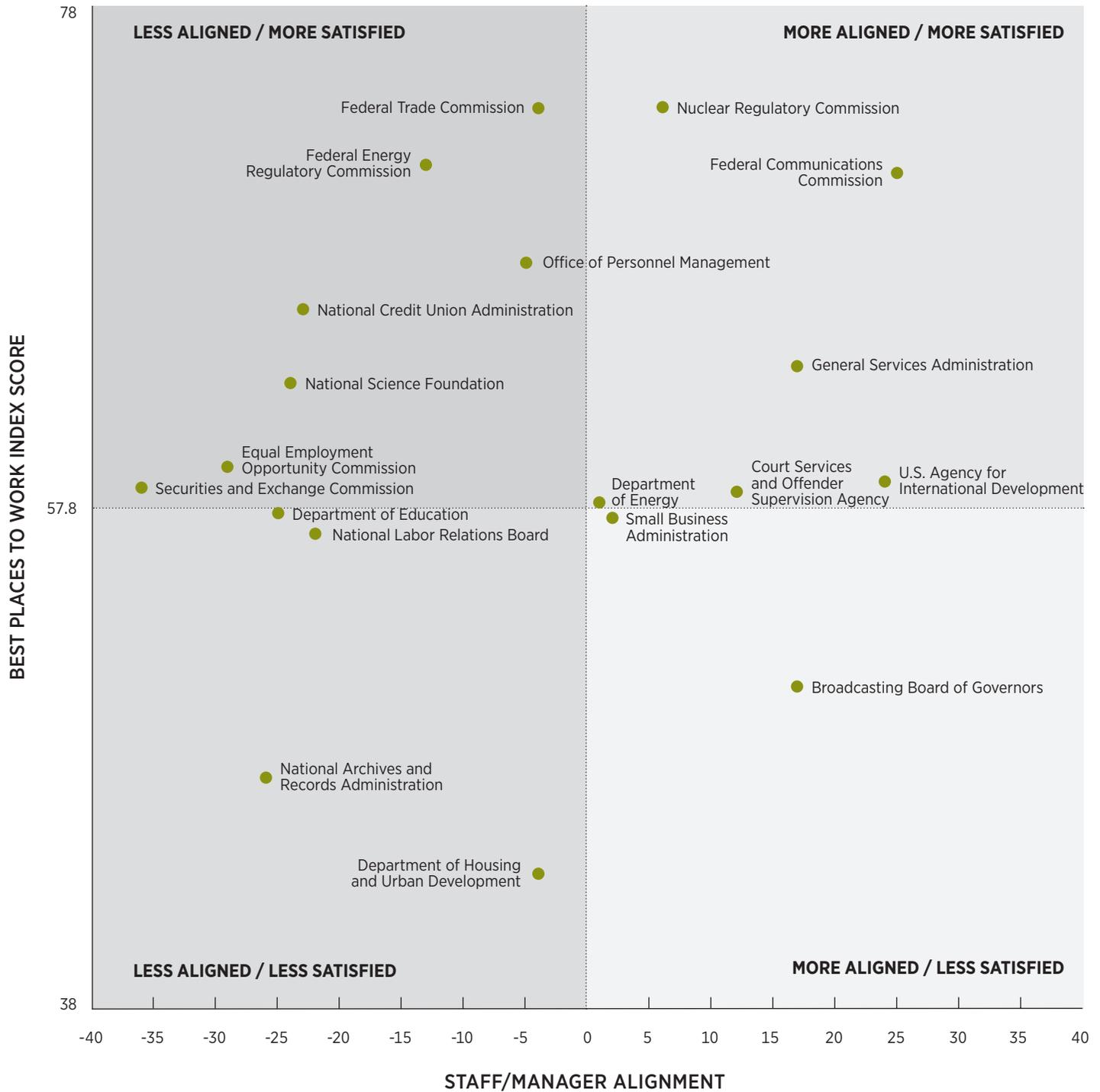
-- = No staff/manager alignment score available

Agency Best Places to Work index scores and staff/manager alignment scores for large agencies

These graphs show large and mid-size agencies sorted by their staff/manager alignment score. Scores can range from +44 to -44. A positive score indicates greater alignment between staff and managers, and a negative score shows that there is less alignment between the two groups at the agency.



Agency Best Places to Work index scores and staff/manager alignment scores for mid-size agencies



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AGENCIES

Differences in views of employees and managers are present and normal in every workplace. The staff/manager alignment data is one element that can provide greater perspective into the strengths and weaknesses of the workplace, but should be used in conjunction with other employee satisfaction data, such as the *Best Places to Work* index score and the *Best Places to Work* category scores. To use the data effectively, it's important for leaders to consider this three step approach.

Understand any staff/manager alignment issues

Use the staff/manager alignment data to understand potential challenges to improving agency performance. Sizable differences in views between staff and managers mean that leaders will need to put in more time gaining buy-in and support from the entire workforce for any change efforts. A deeper examination of the data will identify key areas where staff and managers differ significantly. For example, the data may show that there is wide disagreement between employees and managers on merit promotion policies, information that could help inform and target agency improvement efforts.

Discover root causes behind divergent viewpoints

Involve employees directly in the planning process and make certain that views from staff and managers are heard before determining which actions to take to improve the workplace. Have an executive champion organize focus groups, town halls or listening sessions for senior leaders, managers and staff to identify reasons for divergent views.

Develop an action plan to improve alignment, target root causes and incorporate leading practices

Identify specific actions to address the underlying causes behind identified challenges. Develop an action plan to implement the solutions by including employees and ensuring the identified activities fit well within the agency's culture. Some agencies worked to improve staff/manager alignment by having:

- Executives and managers improve communication with staff through a variety of techniques, including brown bag lunches with employees, anonymous online mailboxes for employees to share concerns or public recognition of exceptional achievements from all business units in periodic agency-wide communications from the head of the agency.
- Senior executives provide additional training for managers on how to deliver effective performance appraisals, communicate regularly with their staff or involve employees in decision-making to help create an informed and aligned workforce.
- The training office and union representatives identify training needs, and provide and publicize additional training opportunities for staff. This enables staff to recommend development offerings that they feel are critical to their success.

Bringing staff and managers closer together in their understanding of the issues that divide them can be a powerful launching point to improve agency performance. The alignment score can be a valuable tool to help agencies better understand the workforce dynamics and use the information to improve workforce satisfaction and commitment, and ultimately achieve even greater mission results.

METHODOLOGY

The agency alignment score is based on the differences between the percentage positives for agency managers and staff on 44 of 50 questions we use in the *Best Places to Work* analysis. Questions from alternative work and employee support programs are not included in the calculation of the staff/manager alignment score.

STEP 1

Determining the staff/manager gap

For example, if 71 percent of managers (employees with supervisory responsibility) responded positively to a question, while only 50 percent of staff (employees without supervisory responsibility) responded positively, there is a difference, or gap, of 21 percentage points. But is this gap normal?

STEP 2

Comparing the gap to the normal range

When we line up all of the differences for all participating agencies on this question, we find that the normal range is between 7.7 percentage points and 16.0 percentage points. A 21 percentage point gap is greater than the 75th percentile boundary, so we consider it to be significantly large.

STEP 3

Assigning alignment score points

If an agency's gap on a question falls outside the normal range and is significantly large (exceeds the 75th percentile for all agencies), we subtract one point from its overall alignment score because it means that staff and managers are less aligned than normal on that question. Gaps falling within the normal range (within 25th to 75th percentile) add 0 points to the overall alignment score, while gaps that are significantly small (lower than the 25th percentile) add 1 point to the overall alignment score.

STEP 4

Calculating the overall alignment score

After points are determined for all questions that are part of the *Best Places to Work* rankings, we calculate a total staff/manager alignment score for each agency. An agency's score will fall between -44 and +44, indicating the overall degree of alignment between staff and managers within the organization.