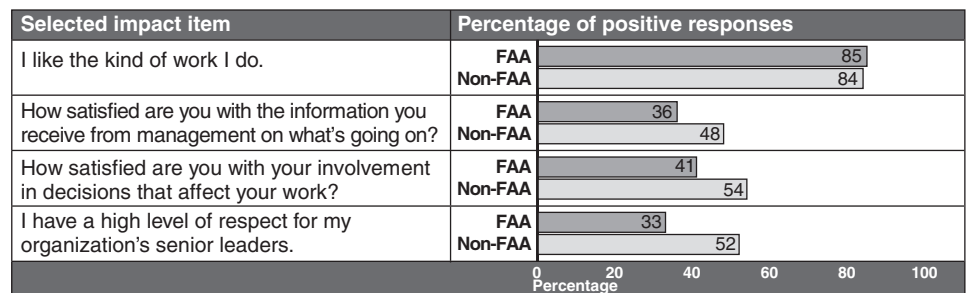# FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

Human Capital System Incorporates Many Leading Practices, but Improving Employees' Satisfaction with Their Workplace Remains a Challenge

Why GAO Did This Study

Aviation is critical to the nation's economic well-being, global competitiveness, and national security. The Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) 48,000 employees guide aircraft, oversee safety, and maintain air traffic control equipment. FAA will need these skills and additional expertise to address evolving missions. As requested, GAO reviewed (1) how FAA's human capital system compares with practices of leading organizations and (2) how FAA employees' workplace satisfaction compares with that of other federal government employees. GAO reviewed documents and relevant studies, and interviewed FAA officials who implement human capital procedures and union representatives. GAO also reviewed survey data on workplace satisfaction.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes recommendations in this report to the Secretary of Transportation aimed at improving diversity management by incorporating leading practices and establishing accountability for increasing employees' satisfaction with their workplace. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Department of Transportation generally agreed to consider GAO's recommendations and provided technical corrections, which GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View GAO-10-89 or key components.
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What GAO Found

FAA's human capital system incorporates many practices used in leading organizations, but the agency's placement near the bottom in best places to work rankings, published by the Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation, could pose challenges to employee recruitment, motivation, and retention. As part of strategic workforce planning, FAA determines the critical skills needed in its workforce and assesses individual worker skill levels. It also follows leading practices in performance management, but FAA officials and union representatives questioned the system's fairness, echoing concerns that they have raised in the past. FAA follows fewer leading practices in diversity management, but has an opportunity to strengthen its efforts as it updates diversity outreach plans. Despite these efforts, FAA ranked 214th out of 216 agencies in 2009 as the best place to work in the federal government, similar to its ranking in 2007. These low rankings could pose obstacles to FAA's efforts to retain its existing workforce and recruit staff with the requisite skills needed to implement the Next Generation Air Transportation System. By fiscal year 2013, FAA projects that 38 percent of its employees who perform work that is critical to FAA's mission will be eligible to retire.

While FAA employee responses to governmentwide surveys indicate that they like their work, their responses are considerably less positive than the rest of the federal government regarding other factors that have an impact on employee recruitment, motivation, and retention (see figure). The percentage of FAA employees' positive responses regarding communications, involvement in decisions that affect their work, and respect for their leaders were up to 19 points below those of the rest of the federal government (see figure). FAA has developed an action plan to improve leadership and create a performance-based culture that could improve employees' workplace satisfaction. However, FAA has not established accountability for the plan's success.

FAA and Non-FAA Positive Responses to a 2008 Governmentwide Survey

Selected impact item	Percentage of positive responses	
I like the kind of work I do.	FAA	85
	Non-FAA	84
How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on?	FAA	36
	Non-FAA	48
How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?	FAA	41
	Non-FAA	54
I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders.	FAA	33
	Non-FAA	52

Percentage scale: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100

Source: GAO analysis of Federal Human Capital Survey data.

United States Government Accountability Office